AUG., 1905 194 PAGES CHOICE FICTION 10 CENTS

The Popular Magazine

ON THE TOP WAVE OF SUCCESS
IN POPULARITY AND CIRCULATION

A new series by CUTCLIFFE HYNE, author of "CAPTAIN KETTLE," begins in September

VOL. IV. NO. 4

The Popular Magazine

CONTENTS FOR AUGUST, 1905

THE LURE OF THE DIM TRAILS. A Complete Novel, **B. M. Bower** . . . 1
A tale of ranch life, by the author of the "Flying U" stories.

THE BIRD O' FREEDOM. A Short Story, . . . **Capt. George Wycherly-Kaye** 43
The account of a somewhat strenuous Fourth of July celebration in the Philippines.

THE TWO-HANDED CLAYMORE. A Serial Story, . **Charles Carey** . . 49
The dangerous enterprise on which a band of conspirators who placed credence in an old legend embarked, thereby endangering the peace of more than one country.

WHY HE APPLAUDED, ... 64

WINNING HIS RIGHTS. A Short Story, ... **Edwin L. Sabin** . . 65
How the sense of injustice spurred a college athlete on to achieving a victory against great odds.

DECLINED WITH THANKS, ... 73

EDITORIAL ANNOUNCEMENT, ... 74

THE PRIVATE WAR. A Serial Story, ... **Louis Joseph Vance** . . 75
Being the Truth About Gordon Traill: His Personal Statement.

CAP'N HAM AND THE LIONESS. A Short Story, . **Charles Edward Barns** . 94
The strategy displayed by the mate of a ship bearing a cargo of wild animals, who also proved himself to be something of a financier.

A YANKEE KNIGHT ERRANT. A Complete Novel, . **George Bronson-Howard** . 106
Another episode in the career of *Yorke Norroy*, secret agent for the Department of State.

SUB-LETTING A CONTRACT, ... 119

THE MAROONED CAMPERS. A Short Story, . . **Charles Fort** . . . 120
The amusing experiences of a party of young men who camped out.

A RURAL ART CRITIC, ... 125

AYESHA. A Serial Story, ... **H. Rider Haggard** . . 126
A companion story to Mr. Haggard's most famous novel of adventure, "She."

THE BETTING COMMISSIONER. A Short Story, . **Charles Steinfort Pearson** 138
The third of a new series of "Romances of the Race Course."

THE IMBECILE. A Serial Story, ... **Andrew Comstock McKenzie** 151
An American civil engineer's extraordinary adventures in Ecuador.

THE CASE OF THE BROAD STREET HOLD-UP. A Short Story, **Scott Campbell** . . . 157
A story in the "Below the Dead Line" series.

THE BRIDAL JEWELS. A Short Story, ... **Louis Tracy** . . . 170
The confessions of a hotel manager.

THE APE AND THE DIAMOND. A Serial Story, . . **Richard Marsh** . . . 180
The tale of a gem that possessed some peculiar properties.

YEARLY SUBSCRIPTION, $1.20 **SINGLE COPIES, 10 CENTS**

Monthly Publication Issued by STREET & SMITH, 79-89 Seventh Avenue, New York

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WARNING—Do not subscribe through agents unknown to you. Complaints are daily made by persons who have been thus victimized.

TEN YEARS

"What I Have Done in Ten Years. The Story of My Wonderful Success."

I HOPE every reader of THE POPULAR MAGAZINE will write me. I would like to send you my free book, entitled "Ten Years—The Story of My Wonderful Success." It has something to say about one of the greatest and most promising investment, opportunities ever offered. I believe I have the best proposition from an investor's standpoint that could be placed before you. My book tells all about the success I have met with during my ten years of business life, and about its exceptional future possibilities. My success has been unprecedented. I started business in the city of Brooklyn in 1896. My capital amounted to less than $25.00. My first year's business netted me over $1,000. Last year I paid dividends to my partners of 15%. Five years ago my business had grown so large that I was compelled to remove to larger quarters. I am now at 63 and 65 Clark Street, Brooklyn, in connection with the Hotel St. George. I have to-day what experts have pronounced the best-appointed Institution of its kind in the country. I estimate the equipment of the Mac Levy Institute of Physical Culture to be worth at least $40,000. The Mac Levy Co. own free and clear its equipment. It also controls valuable patents—such as the Mac Levy Steel Bar System, famous all over the country, and the Mac Levy Trolley System, for quick and safe instruction in swimming. The local business done by the Mac Levy Institute of Physical Culture is very large. Especially at this time of the year, when the swimming season is just opening. Last year I operated three different places teaching swimming: one at Arverne-by-the-sea, L. I., another at Steeple Chase Park, Coney Island, and at our Brooklyn Institute. During the summer months I taught thousands to swim. I had thirteen instructors on my payroll. Each instructor worked ten hours a day, and allowed on an average of 20 minutes to each pupil. You can get an idea from this, the amount of business which I did during the warm summer months. This, you understand, was in addition of my Mail Order Department and regular Physical Culture business. I have long thought that there are thousands of people in moderate circumstances who would like to invest a few dollars in an Institution of this kind. At last I decided to offer a block of the treasury stock of this Company to the public at its par value. I have good reasons for coming to this decision. I wish to put into operation extensive plans for extending the business of the Mac Levy Institute of Physical Culture and the Mac Levy Gymnasium Equipment Co. I also wish to erect a building that will enable me to meet adequately the growing demands of my business. If you are of a speculative mind I do not want you as a partner. Wall Street is the place for you—where thousands of dollars are lost in mining and oil stocks. If you have a few dollars that you want to invest where it will earn more for you than the 3 or 4% which savings banks pay their depositors, I want you to read my book. I want you as a partner in this great Institution. Do not let your money stand idle earning only 3 or 4% which the savings banks pay their depositors. Put it to work. Join it with mine. I believe that within a year this Company will pay dividends of at least 20%. If you have read this advertisement thus far, I know that you have become interested in this great enterprise. I know that you will enjoy reading my carefully prepared book. It tells all about myself, my wonderful success and fame, physical culture plans, and what I believe the future holds for all who join me in making this Institution world-wide in scope. Let me send you this book. It is absolutely free. Write for it to-day. Now.

MAC LEVY,

President Mac Levy Co., Inc.,

Dept. 50. **63-65 Clark St., Brooklyn, N. Y.**

Ainslee's

"THE MAGAZINE THAT ENTERTAINS"

FOR AUGUST

The August number of AINSLEE'S will be one of the most attractive mid-summer magazines that lovers of really good fiction have ever had provided for their entertainment. The constantly increasing tendency in American life toward the healthy freedom and inspiring recreations of outdoor existence will be given delightful expression in the list of stories that has been provided.

They have been selected not merely because they are appropriate to the season of the year, but because pure, fresh air is a good thing, even in the pages of a magazine occasionally.

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The wholesome, out-of-door atmosphere permeates the novelette, which is called **"The Adventures of Joujou,"** by *Edith Macvane.*

This and the French setting, which, as our readers know, Miss Macvane handles with great skill and charm, modified by the breeziness of a typical American girl, make a strikingly original, yet altogether vital, story.

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The short stories will be fresh and new and entertaining. Summer sports will have a place among them, but will not be unduly emphasized. Golf will figure in **"A Stratagem of the Links,"** by *Kenneth Brown;* yachting in **"The Marvel Maid,"** by *Beatrice Hanscom,* and **"By Right of a Foul,"** by *F. Walworth Brown;* racing in **"A Star Ruby,"** by *Martha McCulloch-Williams,* and the diversions of the seashore in **"An Unpremeditated Adjustment,"** by *Elizabeth Payne.* A strong and absorbingly dramatic love story will be **"False Equivalents,"** by *H. F. Prevost Battersby,* and *Holman F. Day* will add the leaven of humor in **"A. Doughty, Silent Pardner."**

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There will also be a significant essay entitled **"The Fascinating of Forty,"** by *Anne Rittenhouse,* in which attention will be directed to one of the peculiar conditions resulting from the development of modern society.

LEARN TO WRITE ADVERTISEMENTS

And Earn $25.00 to $100.00 a Week

This is the original advertising School you have heard so much about.

IF a person with every obstacle in his way can go through our school and profit by the practical instruction we give by correspondence, there is no excuse for your being handicapped by a lack of advertising knowledge. There are two reasons, however, usually offered by the average man with good intentions when he defers immediate action. One is, "lack of money," the other, "lack of time." These reasons will always hold you back if you do not eliminate them. The great mass of humanity invariably shows a ready excuse for its present condition. The young fellow who is working at a small salary in the store, in the office, or in the shop, will give excuses for his present condition. Still, he attends entertainments, watches the base ball score, and interests himself in other sports and amusements. He thinks that luck will some day come his way. He thought the same last year, and will continue to think the same next year. His excuses are your advantage because he is the sort of fellow that comprises the great mass of people. When opportunity for advancement knocks at your door be ready to let her enter. It is lack of common-sense and forethought on your part to satisfy yourself with flimsy excuses.

BIG MONEY IN THE BUSINESS.

I do not care whether you are a clerk at $12 a week or an employer at $10,000 a year, the same opportunity for increasing your present income is offered in this Educational Institution.

The business man is the one who has common-sense enough to see the benefit of a business knowledge and he is the man who writes for full information. He is not necessarily at the head of a concern, but he is ambitious, and has within him seeds from which his future success will grow. We do not want natural-born dullards. Advancement does not appeal to them. They do not want to advance and therefore there is no danger of our receiving even an inquiry from them. But to the man of ambition and strong desire to advance in life we want to extend our helping hand so that he may lift himself out of his present condition. For such a man the future holds out better things than the daily routine, where the obstacles, "lack of money" and "no time" are always in his mind.

You have as much time at your disposal as a street car conductor who worked twelve hours a day and who is now earning $2,000 a year as advertising manager.

You can spare the money as easily as the man who received $8.00 a week, $6.00 of which he used for the support of his mother. He joined our school and is to-day enjoying a $4,000 income.

You have as much natural ability as the bundle wrapper we educated in advertising. He is earning $2,000 a year.

Your future looks as bright as Milford B. Martin's future looked to him when he was a newsboy on the streets of Grand Rapids. His advertising education helped him to the present position as director in an incorporated concern of a million and a half.

YOU ARE BOUND TO SUCCEED.

You have the advantage of scores of others we could mention here, and better advantages than many of the men and women in our long list of successful students who are to-day enjoying the benefits of proper preparation. It wont cost anything to find out what we can do for you. If you care enough for your own advancement in business you will take the time to write us a few lines asking for our beautiful 48-page prospectus which will be sent you free. It contains all the information you desire, setting forth the most profitable and fascinating study and points out the way for better qualifying you for business affairs.

Write for it now and we will send it to you free of cost. Just enter your name on the coupon and address your letter

8171

Page-Davis Co.

PAGE-DAVIS COMPANY
Chicago or New York

Address Either Office:

90 Wabash Ave.
CHICAGO

150 Nassau St.
NEW YORK

CUT ALONG THIS LINE

Send me without cost your prospectus and all other information setting forth a most profitable profession for a man or woman to enter.

Name.....

Address.....

City.....State.....

A Chat With You

LAST month we told you that we would soon be ready to make an important announcement. We are ready now. The September number—next month's issue of THE POPULAR—will mark an important point in the policy of the magazine. In it will commence a new series of stories by Cutcliffe Hyne, whose Captain Kettle is better known to the English-speaking public to-day than any character in recent fiction.

YOU know, without our telling you, what a tremendous success the Captain Kettle stories made. Perhaps you wondered whether Mr. Hyne could be induced to write a new series of stories on the same lines. A great many publishers, ourselves included, felt that the public wanted more stories of the same kind. We finally succeeded in getting them, and next month we will introduce to you Commander John Kelly McTurk, of the United States Navy.

COMMANDER McTURK starts with one big advantage over Captain Kettle. He is an American. He believes in the future of America, is sure that the American Navy is the best in the world, and thinks that it ought to be used more. It is not his fault that the United States has not annexed half the islands in the Pacific. He is a clever and resourceful naval officer, seemingly reckless, but gifted with a sort of intuition that helps him out of tight places. He is a man you would like to know.

WE who have read the stories can promise you that they are the finest that Mr. Hyne has ever turned out. The first, which appears in the September issue, is entitled "Annexed in Error," and tells how Commander McTurk tries to force the government to annex an island in the Pacific.

YOU realize that a magazine has to make a tremendous effort to secure a series of stories like this. Every publisher in this country and in England knows how valuable such a series is. The magazine that gets it must be lavish of money and energy. We are sure that you will congratulate us when you get next month's issue of THE POPULAR.

THE September number of the magazine will mark the biggest step forward we have ever taken. You know that, from the first, there has been a steady improvement in THE POPULAR. The improvement went hand in hand with a rapid increase in circulation. Since the start each number has repre-

sented an increased amount of time, labor and expense, and has met with an increasing demand for the magazine. Through the summer, when magazines usually languish, we have been thriving, and now that we are turning out the best magazine we have ever produced we are also printing the largest issue.

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YOU will see that everything in the magazine represents an improvement in quality. Besides the Cutcliffe Hyne story, a two-part serial, "The Shipowner," by Morgan Robertson, opens in the September issue. The short stories represent the best fiction of this kind that can be secured. "The Ghost of La Moissine," by Clinton Dangerfield, will take you back to the days of cloak and sword. "Annabel's Wager," by Rafael Sabatini, is a dashing tale of daring adventure that no one can read without a thrill of pleasure. The novelette, "In Defense of Honor," by Captain Hector Orme Blanding, U. S. V., is a story of army life in the Philippines, written by one who knows the life there as it is, and can write about it so that his readers see it also.

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WE are tempted to tell you more about the September POPULAR, but we'll stop here. There are a great many other stories in it, any one of which would make the magazine worth buying. We are saying nothing about this issue. The contents page will prove to you how good it is. Next month's issue will be even better.

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IT is a trite thing to say about an article that "it fills a long-felt want." We are doing something besides filling a want for our readers. We are creating one. The public has always wanted a good magazine of adventure fiction, and we gave them that with the very first issue of THE POPULAR. But since then we have done a great deal more than that, in giving you a new and better kind of magazine and creating a want for something that had never been thought of before.

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WE have been so successful that we feel like thanking you for your help in the past. It is owing to the fact that we are getting more and more readers every month that we are able to increase the quality—which also means increasing the cost—of the magazine. We will not stop improving with the September number. The Cutcliffe Hyne series of stories is only one of a number of surprises we have for you this fall. There are others coming later. THE POPULAR is going to take a big spurt ahead during the next few months, and we advise all of you to order ahead from your newsdealer.

REVERSIBLE

Linene

Collars and Cuffs

Have You Worn Them?

Not "celluloid"—not "paper collars;" but made of fine cloth, exactly resemble fashionable linen goods and cost of dealers, for box of ten, 25c. (2½c. each.)

No Washing or Ironing

When soiled discard. **By mail, 10 collars or 5 pairs of cuffs, 30c.** Sample collar or pair of cuffs for 6c. in U. S. stamps. Give size and style

REVERSIBLE COLLAR CO., Dept., 22, BOSTON, MASS.

STUDY LAW AT HOME

The original school. Instruction by mail adapted to every one. Recognized by courts and educators. Experienced and competent instructors. Takes spare time only. Three courses—Preparatory, Business, College. Prepares for practice. Will better your condition and prospects in business. Students and graduates everywhere. Full particulars and special offer free.

The Sprague Correspondence School of Law,
446 Majestic Bldg, Detroit, Mich.

POST OFFICE POSITIONS

If you are an American over 18 years of age and can read and write we will send you **FREE, The Civil Service Book,** telling you how, you can qualify at home, to pass any Civil Service Examination and thus become eligible for a Government Position. Write at once.

International Correspondence Schools,
Box 855 C, Scranton, Pa.

Have You LITERARY TALENT

If so, you owe it to yourself to develop it. Nearly every magazine in the country is calling for original material. We can make you a Journalist by mail. Write at once for free particulars.

Sprague Correspondence School of Journalism,
258 Majestic Building, Detroit, Mich.

BOUND VOLUMES.

Handsome bound volumes of **THE POPULAR MAGAZINE** now ready. Each volume contains eleven hundred and sixty-four pages of interesting reading matter. **PRICE, $1.50.**

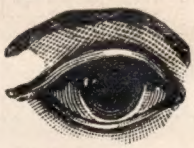
THE POPULAR MAGAZINE, 79-89 Seventh Ave., NEW YORK.

RESTORES EYESIGHT

Spectacles a Thing of the Past

"Actina," A Marvelous Discovery That Cures All Afflictions of the Eye and Ear Without Cutting or Drugging

There is no need for cutting, drugging or probing the eye for any form of disease, for a new system of treating afflictions of the eye has been discovered whereby all torturous and barbarous methods are eliminated. There is no risk or experimenting, as hundreds of people have been cured of blindness, failing eyesight, cataracts, granulated lids and other afflictions of the eye through this grand discovery, when eminent oculists termed the cases incurable.



General Alexander Hamilton, Tarrytown-on-the-Hudson, N. Y., highly recommends "Actina."

Louis Meyer, 93 Herman Street, Rochester, N. Y., writes: "Actina" has effected a wonderful cure in my wife's case, curing her of a severe eye trouble and I would not be without it.

Mr. A. L. Howe, Tully, N. Y., writes: "Actina" has removed cataracts from both my eyes. I can read well without my glasses; am sixty-five years old.

Robert Baker, Ocean Park, Cal., writes: I should have been blind had I not used "Actina."

Hundreds of other testimonials will be sent on application. "Actina" is purely a home treatment and self-administered by the patient, and is sent on trial, postpaid. If you will send your name and address to the New York and London Electric Ass'n, Dept. 96B, 929 Walnut St., Kansas City, Mo., you will receive absolutely free a valuable book, Prof. Wilson's Treatise on the Eye and on Disease in General.

A mortgage is like Deacon Smith's mule, "Dreadful sot in its ways." It has a habit of bobbing up regularly. While you live you can take care of it. After that—well, you'd be wise now to consult the

Penn Mutual Life
Philad'a

Money

And How It Can Be Made In The Advertising Business

By GEORGE H. POWELL.

Ability to earn a large salary or income in the constantly growing field of advertising is simply a question of training.

The old way was for the young man or woman, fortunate enough to be employed in a business where sufficient advertising was done to warrant an advertising department, to get an occasional chance to practice ad writing and submit it to the expert manager for criticism and advice.

One of the greatest and highest priced advertising managers in America to-day began in just this way. He was one of my stenographers fourteen years ago, and I had the hardest sort of work in trying to get him to study and learn. His idea was that ad writers are "born, not made," but he knows better now.

The great trouble with such instruction was that both expert and student made it a sort of side issue when pressure of regular duties permitted—and many were the lapses.

A little thinking will convince any one that all the benefits of personal instruction can be obtained by the correct correspondence system, for they must result from the study and analysis of certain models, followed by actual practice in ad writing.

The Powell System as a matter of fact gives in a few months from four to ten times the expert training that any one could possibly obtain in a year on the old, unsatisfactory personal-contact plan.

A good many people have thought that correspondence instruction in advertising is a makeshift—a kind of substitute for personal-contact instruction.

But the opposite is a proven fact. The Powell System qualifies scores of bright people to fill positions worth from $25 a week up in less than six months, while the old plan of monkeying around the advertising department has seldom qualified in a year, and more often not at all.

The Powell System calls for an hour or so practice daily, and if this steady work under my personal direction isn't of the sort that makes experts, then all the boasted science of mental training ever known since the world began is a fallacy.

Only two things are necessary on the part of the student at the start—a good common school education, plus willingness to work. No inborn talent, no precociousness, no handiness with the pen, no artistic ability, but simply the two essentials previously mentioned.

Of course mentality counts in advertising as in everything else, and I never advise any but those who are properly fortified to take up this great work.

But I do urge the right young men and women to become Powell students, for there is a constantly growing demand for their services at salaries and incomes ranging from $1,200.00 to $5,000.00 a year—and even more.

Graduates from our public schools, seminaries, academies and colleges will find advertising the greatest money-making business in the world, and the Powell System of mail instruction will cut off years of hard servitude, because it concentrates the efforts and produces original, snappy ad writers.

I have two free books to mail those desiring to investigate—my elegant Prospectus and "Net Results," the most explanatory ever published. Those in doubt can also seek my advice without charge. Merely address me

GEORGE H. POWELL, 1532 TEMPLE COURT, NEW YORK CITY.

Prize Winner at 14th Lesson.

Although my fourteenth lesson is but just completed, your thoroughness and ability to teach advertising has already been proven to me. I enclose clippings from local paper announcing me as winner of the Langley Advertising Writing Contest.

This demonstrates your ability to successfully teach the student possessing a mere common school education—in my case a machinist at that. The working of the master mind is shown in your personal criticisms, and I look to them with as much interest as the regular lessons.

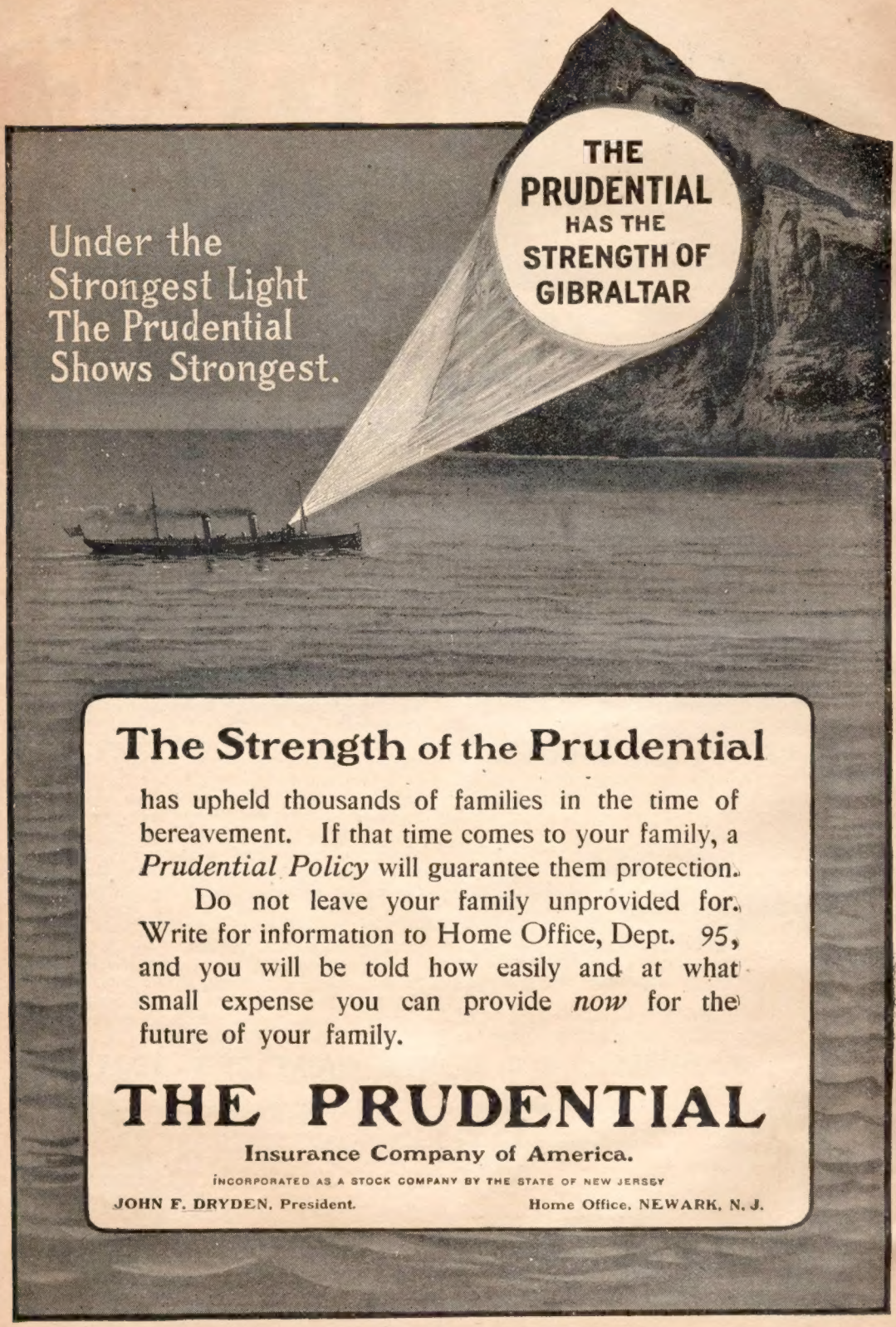
C. B. BROWN, Waterbury, Conn.

Boomed His Business.

Previous to taking up the Powell System last October, I had made repeated efforts to write presentable advertising matter, but was handicapped. Since completing your instruction I have written the ads for our firm—Allen & Miller—with the best results, and am much gratified. We also use circular letters, mailing cards, etc., a batch of which I am now sending you.

To those who contemplate taking up advertising, either as a vocation or in connection with business, I most heartily recommend the Powell System.

WALTER MILLER,
Sewal, Ia.



The Strength of the Prudential

has upheld thousands of families in the time of bereavement. If that time comes to your family, a *Prudential Policy* will guarantee them protection.

Do not leave your family unprovided for. Write for information to Home Office, Dept. 95, and you will be told how easily and at what small expense you can provide *now* for the future of your family.

THE PRUDENTIAL

Insurance Company of America.

INCORPORATED AS A STOCK COMPANY BY THE STATE OF NEW JERSEY

JOHN F. DRYDEN, President. Home Office, NEWARK, N. J.

THE POPULAR MAGAZINE

VOL. IV. AUGUST, 1905. No. 4.

The Lure of the Dim Trails

A STORY OF THE CATTLE INDUSTRY

By B. M. Bower

Author of "Chip, of the Flying U," "The Intervention of Almighty Voice," Etc.

Cattle-raising, which forms the background of this engrossing narrative, played a very prominent part in the upbuilding and development of the great West, and it is to-day one of the most important, as it is one of the most picturesque, industries of our country. Not a few men now holding high positions in the land—notably Theodore Roosevelt—drifted out West in their youth and lived the wild, free life of the ranchman, which possesses a peculiar fascination both for those who experience it and for those who can only read about it. Next month we shall publish a novel of army life.

(***A Complete Story***)

CHAPTER I.

WHAT do you care, anyway?" asked Reeve-Howard philosophically. "It isn't as though you depended on the work for a living. Don't worry over the failure of a pastime to be successful; you don't need to write——"

"Neither do you *need* to slave over those dry-point things," Thurston retorted, in none the best humor. "Your income is as generous as mine; yet you slave day and night, when the fit is on. And I notice you hate like the mischief to fail, even though——"

"Only I never have failed," put in Reeve-Howard, with the complacency born of much adulation.

Thurston kicked a plush foot-rest out of his way. "Well, unfortunately, I have. The fashion now is for strenuous tales of the swashbuckling order, with a haze of powder smoke hanging thick over the pages. Bah!"

"That is your cue, Phil, if you must write. Come out from your pink-tea atmosphere and take your heroines away out beyond the Mississippi—or into New Mexico."

"New Mexico is also beyond the Mississippi, I believe," said Thurston, coldly.

"Perhaps; I'm weak on those things. At any rate, follow the fashion if you would keep pace with the procession. Why don't you write things about the

Of this series, stories on the following themes have been published: Journalism (January); cotton (February); oil (March); gold-mining (April); finance (May); wheat (June) and the navy (July). The back numbers can be secured through any newsdealer. Price, ten cents each.

plains? I should think it would be easy—you were born out there in the wilderness somewhere."

"I have," sighed Thurston. "My last rejection states that the local color is not 'convincing.' Hang the local color!" The plush foot-rest suffered again.

Reeve-Howard got into his topcoat languidly, as he did everything else. "What you ought to do, then," he drawled, "is to go out and study the West; get in touch with the life, and your local color will convince. Personally, though, I like those little society skits you do——"

"Skits!" exploded Thurston. "The last thing I had published was a four-part serial."

"So it was. Well, take my advice, Phil, go out and learn your West; a month or two will put you up to date on your subject—and, by Jove! I half envy you the trip."

That is what put the idea into Thurston's head; and as Thurston's ideas generally bore fruit, of one sort or another, he went out that very day and ordered an outfit of clothing which seemed to him suitable, and which, to his mind, already breathed an atmosphere of the plains. The purchase of a saddle he postponed, because, although he searched diligently among the shops, he could find nothing that looked just like the saddles in the pictures which Remington or Russell drew, and he had no mind to make a mistake.

That night he stayed in his den and dreamed of the West. His memory conjured dim visions of what he had once known; of a land where men and conditions harked back to the primitive; where wide plains, flecked with sage brush and ribboned with brown trails, spread away to the skyline; for Phil Thurston was range-born, if not range-bred. His father had loved best to live out on the edge of things, where the trails of men are dim and far apart—and the silent prairie bequeaths a heritage of longing to her sons.

He brooded over his fancies until a keen hunger grew upon him to see again the little town huddled under the bare, brown hills that shut out the world, and the river always hurrying away to the sunrise, and the gay-blanketed Indians who stole, like painted shadows, about the place. He had been afraid of the river and the bare hills and the Indians. He felt that his mother had been afraid, too. He pictured again the half-forgotten day when strange men had brought his father mysteriously home—men whose heads were bowed, and who carried their hats awkwardly in their hands. There was a day of hushed voices, and weeping and gloom, and then they bore his father as mysteriously away again, and he had cried, with his head in his mother's lap. The rest was blank; for a child of five, the present quickly blurs what is past. He wondered that, after all these years, he should feel the grip of homesickness; but, though he did not realize it, in his veins flowed the adventurous blood of his father, and to it the dim trails were calling.

In three days he set his face eagerly toward the dun deserts and the sage-brush gray.

At Chicago a man took the upper berth in Thurston's section, and settled into the seat opposite with a deep sigh—presumably of thankfulness. Thurston observed the whiteness of his ungloved hands, the coppery tan of his cheeks and throat, the clear keenness of his eyes and the four "dimples" in the crown of his soft, gray hat—the "Stetson" hat of the West—and set him down for some Western farmer returning home from a visit to the stockman's Mecca. After that he went back to his magazine and forgot him.

Twenty miles out, the stranger leaned forward and tapped him on the knee. "Say, I hate t' interrupt yuh," he began, in a whimsical drawl, that seemed a characteristic of the man, "but I'd like t' know where it is I've seen yuh before."

Thurston hesitated between annoyance and curiosity, and replied that he had no remembrance of any previous meeting.

"Mebby not," admitted the man, and his eyes searched Phil's face wistfully. Five miles more, and he touched Thurs-

ton again, insistently. "Say," he drawled, "I'll bet a carload uh steers your name's Thurston. I go further'n that; I bet you're Bud Thurston, and that you b'long in Fort Benton."

Phil stared, and confessed that it was so—although he was not called "Bud."

"That's what me and your dad used t' call yuh," the man declared. "Well, I'll be hanged! But I knew it—you're the dead image uh Bill Thurston. And Bill Thurston and me freighted t'gether from Whoop-up t' Benton, in the seventies; b'fore you was born we was chums. Why, it was me with your dad when the Injuns pot-shot him at Chimney Rock. It was me helped your mother straighten things up so she could pull out back where she come from. Your mother never took t' the West much. Well, I'll be hanged! Doggone your measly hide, where's all them pink apurns yuh used t' wear?" He leaned back and laughed —a silent, inner convulsion of pure gladness.

Philip Thurston was, generally speaking, a conservative young man, slow to make acquaintances—slower still to discard them. When abroad he wrapped himself in an atmosphere of reserve which forbade familiarity. To be thus taken possession of by a total stranger, and called "Bud," and to be deliberately told, "Doggone your measly hide," was, to say the least, a new experience. What astonished him most was that he liked it; he seemed swept mysteriously back to the primitive past; he liked this tanned, bluff-speaking stranger, with the whimsical drawl and the keen eyes. It was the blood of his father coming to its own.

From that hour Hank Graves looked upon Phil Thurston as his own. He told him things about his father that made his blood tingle with pride—his father, whom he had almost forgotten, yet who had lived bravely his life, daring where other men quailed, going steadfastly upon his way when others hesitated. Leaning back, listening to stories of the past, Phil thought that his father must have been very like Hank Graves—and he loved his memory the better for it.

Two days and a half they talked. The train had long since been racing over the silent prairies, spread invitingly with tender green — great, lonely, mysterious, yet luring men with a spell as sure and strong as does the sea.

The train reeled across a long trestle that spanned a deep gash in the earth. Down in the bottom huddled a cluster of pigmy cattle and mounted men. Further down were two tents, that looked like huge snowflakes dropped into the green canyon.

"That's the Lazy Eight—my outfit," said Graves, pointing a forefinger as they whirled on. "I've got t' get off next station. Yuh want t' remember, Bud, the Lazy Eight's your home from now on. We'll make a cow puncher of yuh in no time; you've got it in yuh, or yuh wouldn't look so much like your dad. And you c'n write stories about us till further orders. The way I got the summer planned out, you'll git all the material yuh want—and then some. If yuh foller the Lazy Eight through till shipping time, you c'n set down and write stories till—till you're tired."

"Or till the editors are," Thurston amended.

"Well, editors is a breed I don't know much about—except the one that runs the *Shellanne Arrow*—and I settled him in about two minutes."

Thurston, thinking of certain editors whom he knew, smiled to himself. He wondered how it would seem to them to be "settled in about two minutes" by a man like Hank Graves.

The train slowed at a little red station, with a red section house not far away, and a red-fronted saloon quite as near.

"Here we are," cried Graves, "and I ain't sorry—only I wisht you was going t' stop. I'll look for yuh in three or four days, at the outside. So long, Bud; don't forgit the Lazy Eight's your hangout."

CHAPTER II.

For the rest of the way, Thurston watched the green hills slide by, and gave himself up to half-fanciful visions of Fort Benton—visions of creaking

bull trains creeping slowly down the hill, of many bales of buffalo hides on the river bank, and clamorous little steamers churning up against the current.

But when he reached the place, and wandered aimlessly about the streets, the vision faded into half-resentful realization that these things were no more. For the bull trains, a round-up outfit clattered noisily out of town and disappeared in an elusive dust cloud; for the gay-blanketed Indians, cowboys galloped into town, slid from their saddles and clanked into the nearest saloon or the post office. Between whiles the town cuddled luxuriously down in the deep little valley and slept, while the river, undisturbed by pompous little steamers, murmured a lullaby.

Thoroughly disenchanted, on the second day Thurston loaded himself and his belongings into a prehistoric vehicle, which seemed to him thoroughly in keeping with the town, and went away up the long hill which shut out the world, and paced the depot platform quite impatiently, with never a vision to keep him company, until the eastbound pulled in.

For an hour Thurston's eyes clung to the prairie land. Going through a long cut, he chanced to turn his head, and looked straight into the clear, blue-gray eyes of a girl who sat across the aisle. Thurston considered himself an immune from blue-gray eyes, or any other sort of eyes—so he regarded her quite calmly and judicially. She was a Western girl—he could tell that by the tan, and by her frank disregard of the pompadour fad; her hair was brushed smoothly back, and had little, irresponsible waves in it here and there. Thurston decided that the style, though out of date, was distinctly becoming to her. He wondered idly if the fellow beside her was her brother; and then he told himself no—brothers did not, generally speaking, exert themselves to be agreeable to their sisters as did the young man across the aisle.

Another hour and the coaches bumped together sharply, the wheels screeched as the brakes clutched them, and the train, grinding protest in every joint, came, with a final heavy jar, to a dead stop. Out ahead came the sharp crack of rifles. A passenger behind Thurston leaned out of the window, and a bullet shattered the glass above him; he dodged back hastily.

Some one hurried through the front vestibule, the door was pushed unceremoniously open, and a man—a giant he seemed to Thurston—stopped just inside, glared down the length of the coach through slits in the black cloth over his face, and bawled: *"Hands up!"*

Two seconds and the coach seemed filled with uplifted, trembling hands. The man behind Thurston raised his hands with the others—but one held a revolver, which cracked close against Thurston's ear—so close that he ducked involuntarily. There was an echo from the front, and the man who risked so much lurched into the aisle, swaying uncertainly between the seats. He of the mask fired again, and the passenger collapsed into a still heap on the floor. The revolver dropped from his fingers and struck against Thurston's foot, making him wince. Thurston had never before seen death come to a man, and the very suddenness unnerved him. All his faculties seemed numb before that terrible, pitiless form in the door, and the limp, dead body in the aisle at his feet.

Presently he awoke to the realization of certain words spoken insistently close beside him. He turned his eyes, and saw that the girl, her eyes staring straight before her, was yet commanding him, slowly, her voice holding to that murmuring monotone more discreet than a whisper:

"The gun—at your feet—drop down—and get it. He can't see—to shoot—for the seat—in front," was what she said.

Thurston looked at her helplessly. In truth, he had never fired a gun in his life.

"The gun—get it—and shoot——" Her eyes moved quickly in an imperious, sidelong glance. Her straight eyebrows drew together commandingly.

Thurston looked down at the gun, and at the huddled form. A tiny river of blood was creeping toward him. Already it had reached his foot, and his shoe was red along the sole. He moved his foot mechanically away from it, and a splotch of anger showed under the tan on the girl's cheek. Her lips curled unpleasantly. Thurston caught his breath and looked toward the door, wondering if he could do what she suggested. He seemed under a spell of horror—a horror born of that lifeless thing at his feet, and of the blood which crept always toward him.

At that instant the tawny-haired young fellow beside her gathered himself for a spring, and flung himself headlong before the girl and into the aisle; caught the dead man's pistol from the floor and fired, seemingly with one movement. Then he stood up, still firing as fast as the trigger could move. From the door came answer, shot for shot. The car was filled with the rank odor of powder smoke. A woman screamed hysterically.

Then a puff of cool, prairie wind came in through the shattered window behind Thurston, and the smoke-cloud lifted, like a curtain blown aside. The tawny-haired young fellow was walking coolly down the aisle, the smoking revolver pointed steadily toward the outlaw, who lay stretched upon his face, his fingers twitching.

Outside, the sharp crack of rifles sounded, like corn in a giant popper. Presently it slackened to an occasional shot. A brakeman, followed by two coatless men with Winchesters, ran down the length of the train, calling out that the flurry was over, and one robber caught. One of the men swung up on the steps of the day coach.

"Hello, Park," he cried to the tawny-haired boy. "Got one, did yuh? That's good. Think uh the nerve uh that Wagner bunch—to go up against a train in broad daylight. Made an easy get-away, too, except one feller they winged in the express car. How's this'n—dead?"

"No. I reckon he'll get well enough t' stretch a rope; he killed a man in here." Park motioned toward the huddled figure down the aisle.

Together they carried him in and made him as comfortable as possible on a seat. The dead man they took away to the baggage car. A brakeman came with a cloth and wiped up the red pool, and Thurston pressed his lips tightly together and turned away his head. He could not remember when he had felt so deathly sick.

Once he glanced slyly at the girl opposite, and could have sworn she was about to faint. But she did not, and only shuddered violently once or twice. Thurston did not look at her again; he did not like the expression of her mouth.

News of the hold up had been telegraphed ahead, and all Shellanne—which, in truth, was not much of a crowd—was at the station to meet the train. While Thurston was looking uncertainly about him, a voice he knew hailed him joyfully.

"Hello, Bud—got back quicker'n I expected, didn't yuh? Good thing I happened t' be in town—you can go right out home with me." Then Graves relapsed into his drawl. "Yuh got quite a bunch uh material for a story, comin' down, didn't yuh? You'll be writin' blood an' thunder for a week, I reckon."

She of the blue-gray eyes turned and measured Thurston with a leisurely glance—and her mouth still had that unpleasant expression. Hank Graves lifted his hat and called her Mona, and asked her if she was home to stay. Then he beckoned to Park with his finger and winked at the girl—a proceeding which shocked Thurston considerably.

"Mona—here, hold on a minute, can't yuh? Mona, this is a friend uh mine; Bud Thurston's his name. Bud, this is Mona Stevens. She ranges down close t' the Lazy Eight, so the sooner yuh git acquainted, the quicker." He did not say what would be the quicker, and Thurston felt more embarrassed than he would have believed possible.

Miss Stevens gave him a chilly smile, which affected him like a shower, and turned her back upon him, under the thin pretense that her brother was calling her, which he was not. Her brother

was telling what would have happened if *he* had been on that train, and Mona was far from his mind.

Graves slapped the shoulder of the fellow they called Park. "You young devil, next time I leave the place for a week, I'll lock you up in the blacksmith shop. Have you got t' be Mona's special escort these days?"

"Wish I was," Park retorted, unmoved.

"Different here—you ain't much good as it is. But this here's my wagon boss, Park Holloway. One of 'em, that is. I'm goin t' turn yuh over t' him, and let him wise yuh up. You young bucks ought t' git along t'gether pretty well—your dads run buffalo t'gether before either of yuh was born. Let's be movin'—we ain't home yet. Got any baggage, Bud?"

Late that night Thurston lay and listened to the frogs croaking monotonously in the hollow behind the house, and to the lone coyote which harped upon the subject of his wrongs on a distant hillside. Thurston was trying to adjust himself to this new condition of things. Measured by his past, he should feel affronted at the familiarity of strangers who persisted in calling him "Bud," and who took possession of him as a matter of course, with never a thought of whether he liked it or not.

What puzzled Thurston was the fact that he did like it. He felt that he should have disliked it very much—that he should have hated a country where could happen such things as he had witnessed that day. Park Holloway, having wounded a man unto death, calmly dismissed the subject with the remark that the fellow got what was coming to him. And Thurston, much to his secret amazement, heartily agreed with him, and privately resolved to perfect himself in the use of firearms—he who had once pronounced such things brutal.

After much self-analysis, he decided that there was just one unpleasant item in the day's experience—barring the dead passenger who had lain at his feet—and that was the expression of Mona Stevens' mouth. He did not like to remember that; it seemed to say that she thought him a coward. And in his heart, Thurston knew he was not cowardly. The thing was to prove it.

CHAPTER III.

Thurston, dressed immaculately in riding clothes of the latest English cut, went airily downstairs and discovered that he was not early, as he had imagined; seven o'clock, he had told himself proudly, was not bad for a beginner. He smiled in anticipation of Hank Graves' surprise—which was fortunate, since otherwise he would have been cheated of smiling at all; for Hank Graves, he learned, had left the ranch more than an hour before, and the men were scattered to their morning's work.

Thus, properly humbled in spirit, he sat down to the kitchen table and ate his solitary breakfast, while the cook kneaded bread at the other end of the table and eyed Thurston's apparel with tolerant amusement. Phil had never before felt such humility in the presence of a servant; even Reeve-Howard's freshly imported English butler had not so awed him.

He hurried through the meal and escaped into the sunshine, feeling rather foolish in the unaccustomed bagginess of his riding breeches, and the snugness of his leggings—for Phil had never taken to outdoor sports of the old-fashioned sort. He could drive his Winton within a few seconds of the record for amateurs, and he could steer Reeve-Howard's yacht almost like an old sailor. Also, he was counted a worthy antagonist on the links—and that was the sum total of his outdoor accomplishments.

While he was debating the wisdom of writing a detailed description of yesterday's tragedy while it was yet fresh in his mind, and mailing it to Reeve-Howard as an example of the "strenuosity" of the West, Park Holloway rode into the yard and on to the stables. He nodded at Thurston, and grinned without apparent cause. Phil followed him to the corral and watched him pull the saddle off his horse and throw it care-

lessly to one side. It looked cumbersome, that saddle—quite unlike the ones he had inspected in the New York shops. He grasped the horn, shook it tentatively, lifted it and said, "Jove!"

"Heavy, ain't it?" Park laughed, and slipped the bridle down over the ears of his horse, and dismissed it with a slap on the rump. "Don't yuh like the looks of it?" he added, indulgently.

Thurston felt the indulgence, and his mouth straightened a bit. "How do I know?" he retorted. "You—anyone can see that my ignorance is absolutely limitless. I don't mind your laughing at me, Mr. Holloway—I expect that, you know."

"Call me Park," said he of the tawny hair. He leaned against the fence, looking extremely boyish. Thurston could scarcely realize that he was the same fellow who had walked calmly down the aisle, only yesterday, facing a barking revolver and shooting as he went.

"You're bound t' learn all them things," he went on, cheerfully. "So long's yuh don't get swell-headed the first time yuh take a trick, you're all right."

Thurston noted with satisfaction that the indulgence was gone from his voice. "Park, see here," he said, impulsively. "Graves said he'd turn me over to you. It's deuced rough on you, I'll admit, but I feel it's going to be lucky for me. I want to learn things—everything. I hope you'll find fault like the mischief, and—er—knock me into shape, you know."

Park studied him gravely. "Kid," he said, "you'll do. You got the right stuff in yuh, and it's a go. You come along with us after that trail herd, and you'll get knocked into shape fast enough. Smoke?"

Thurston shook his head. "Not those."

"I dunno—I'm afraid yuh can't be the real thing till yuh fan your lungs with cigarette smoke, regular." But the twinkle in his eyes belied him. "Say," asked suddenly, "where'd yuh pick them bloomers?"

"In New York," answered Thurston, smiling in sickly fashion. He had all along been uncomfortably aware of the contrast between his own modish attire and the somewhat disreputable leathern chaps of his companion.

"Well," argued Park, "you're a few miles from New York, m'son. This here's Montana, recollect? I'm going t' call your bluff, and make a howl; I'm going t' tell yuh straight, best thing you can do is make a sneak and take them things off before the boys get sight of 'em. They'd queer yuh with the hull bunch, sure. Uh course," he went on, soothingly, "I know they're stylish back East—but the boys'll likely tell yuh they set like the hide on the hind legs of an elephant. I hate t' say it, kid, but they look like the devil."

"So would you—in New York," declared Phil, a bit testily.

"Sure; but this is the Lazy Eight corral," Park maintained, placidly. "You hike and get some pants on; when you've wised up some, kid, you'll thank me, maybe. I'm going on a little jaunt up the creek, after a while, and you can go along, if yuh like. You'll need t' get hardened t' the saddle before we start for Billings, or you'll do most uh your riding alongside the cook."

Thurston, in resentful mood, went meekly, and did as he was commanded to do; and no man, save Park and the cook, ever glimpsed those smart riding clothes of English cut.

"Now yuh look a heap more human," was the way Park signified his approval of the change. "Here's a little horse that's easy t' ride, and dead gentle; and Hank said yuh could have this saddle for keeps. If yuh go with us t' trail up them cattle from Billings, uh course you'll get a string uh your own t' ride."

"A string? I'm afraid I don't quite catch your meaning."

"Yuh don't savvy riding a string? A string, m'son, is ten or a dozen saddle horses that you ride, turn about, and nobody else can cut in on yuh. Every fellow has got his own string, yuh see."

"I think," ventured Phil, eying his horse distrustfully, "one will be enough for me. I'll scarcely need a dozen." The truth is, he thought Park was laughing at him.

Park slid sidewise in his saddle. "I'll bet yuh ten dollars that by fall you'll have a good-sized string rode down to a whisper. You wait till this kind uh thing gets in your blood, like it's in mine. Why, I'd die if yuh took me off the range! Wait till you set out in the dark, on your horse, and count the stars, and listen t' the cattle breathing, close by—hundreds of 'em in a bunch, sleeping while you ride around and play guardian angel. Wait till your bed-grounds are fifteen or twenty miles apart, and yuh lay down with the smell of new grass in your nostrils. If you're a *man*, you'll be plumb spoiled for your little old East." Then Park swung back his feet, and the horses broke into a lope, which Thurston found exhilarating at first—and after that, exceedingly uncomfortable.

"I've got to go over to the Stevens place," Park informed him. "You met Mona yesterday, yuh remember." Thurston did remember very distinctly. "We want t' start the wagons to-morrow or next day. Hank says you write up stories; is that right?"

Thurston's mind came back from wondering how Mona's mouth looked when she was pleased, and he nodded.

"Well, there's a lot in this country that ain't ever been wrote about, I guess—at least, if it was, I never read it. But the trouble is, them that know ain't in the writing business, and them that write don't take the trouble t' *know*. They set back East, somewhere, and write it like they think maybe it is, and it's a hell of a job they make."

Thurston, remembering the time when he himself "set back East and wrote it like he thought maybe it was," blushed guiltily. He felt glad, all at once, that the stories had been rejected. He shivered to think of one of them falling into the hands of Park Holloway, who seemed prone to speak his mind plainly.

"I came out to learn, and I mean to learn it thoroughly," he said, and felt that he had shown considerable courage to say it in face of the discomfort he was suffering. Just then the horses slowed for a climb, and he sighed, thankfully. "In the first place," he went on, "I wish you'd tell me where you are going with the wagons."

"Why, to Billings," Park answered. "I thought I mentioned Billings before."

"You did, but what are you going there for? Is it to round up some cattle?"

Park was good enough to refrain from mirth. "Well," he explained, patiently, "what we're going to do first thing is t' receive a shipment uh young steers that's coming up from the Panhandle—that's a part uh Texas—and trail 'em up here and turn 'em loose this side uh the river. After that, we'll start the calf round-up. The Lazy Eight runs two wagons, yuh know. I run one, and Deacon Smith runs the other; we work together, though, most uh the time. It makes quite a crew—twenty-five or thirty men."

"I didn't know," said Thurston, dubiously, "that you ever shipped cattle into this country; I thought you shipped them *out*—to Chicago, you know. Is Mr. Graves buying more?"

"Well, I guess yes! Six thousand head uh yearlings and two-year-olds this spring; some seasons it's more. We get in young stock every year, and turn 'em loose on the range till they're ready t' ship. A good many outfits do that; it's cheaper than raising calves, yuh see. When yuh get t' Billings, m'son, you'll see some *cattle!* Why, our bunch alone'll make seven trains—and that ain't a commencement. Cattle's cheap down South this year, and everybody's buying. Hank didn't buy so much as some—he runs quite a bunch uh cows, yuh see. We'll brand six or seven thousand head uh calves this spring. Old Hank ain't asleep, let me tell yuh! He's about the biggest cattle king in the State; most of 'em's companies. But old Hank trots alone—and he sure knows how t' rake in the coin."

Thurston agreed, as well as he could—for they had again struck the level. Seven miles up hill and down hollow, at Park's usual pace, was heart-breaking to a man not accustomed to the saddle. Thurston remembered longingly his Winton, with its luxuriously padded

seats. He had written, just before leaving home, a musical bit of verse, born of his luring dreams, about "the joy of speeding fleetly where the grass land meets the sky," and now he gritted his teeth when he thought of the lines, which seemed to him positively idiotic.

When they reached the ranch, and Mona's mother invited them in, Thurston declined, almost brusquely. He had a suspicion that, once out of the saddle, he would have trouble getting into it again; besides, Mona was not at home, he knew—for her mother told Park so. Her mother seemed a nice, motherly old lady, and Thurston, being rather fond of nice old ladies, would like to have cultivated her acquaintance, had circumstances been more in his favor and had Mona been present. He felt a foolish desire to see Mona in friendly mood.

As it was, they did not tarry, and Phil reached the Lazy Eight alive, but with the glamour gone from his West. If he had not been the son of his father, he would have taken the first train which pointed its nose to the East, and he would never again have essayed Western stories, or musical verse which sang the joys of galloping blithely off to the skyline; in truth, it turned him sick to think of such things as a reality.

He choked back his awe of the cook, and asked him, quite humbly, what was good to take the soreness from one's muscles; afterward he crept painfully up the stairs to his room, clasping in both hands a beer bottle filled with pungent, homemade liniment, which the cook declared was "out uh sight."

Hank Graves, when he heard the story from the cook, slapped his thigh and cried: "The son-of-a-gun! he's his dad's own boy, from the ground up. He'll do, all right." And loved him the better.

CHAPTER IV.

Thurston tucked the bulb of his camera down beside the bellows, and closed the box with a snap. "I wonder what old Reeve would say to that view," he mused.

"Old who?"

"Oh, a fellow back home. Jove! he'd throw up his dry-point fad and take to colors, if he could see this."

The "this" was a panoramic view of the town and surrounding valley of Billings. The day was sunlit and still, and far objects stood up sharp in the clear atmosphere. Here and there the white tents of waiting trail outfits splotched the bright green of the prairies. Horsemen galloped to and from the town at top speed. A long, grimy red cattle train had just snorted out on a siding by the stock yards, and the bellowing of thirsty cattle came faintly, like the roar of pounding surf, from the distance.

Thurston—a different Thurston from the trim, pale young fellow who had followed the lure of the West two weeks before—drew a long breath and looked out over the hurrying waters of the Yellowstone. It was good to be alive, and to live the tented life of the plains. It was good even to be "speeding fleetly where the grass land meets the sky"; two weeks in the saddle had changed Thurston's viewpoint considerably. He turned again toward the dust and the roar of the stock yards, a mile away.

"Perhaps," he remarked, hopefully, "the next train will be ours." Strange how soon a man may identify himself with new conditions and new aims. Just now Thurston's chief thought was of the coming steers, which he referred to unblushingly as "our cattle." Such is the spell of the range life.

"Let's go on over, Bud. That's likely the Circle Bar shipment. Their bunch comes from the same place ours does, and I want t' see how they stack up."

Thurston agreed, and went to saddle up. He had mastered the art of saddling, and could, on lucky days, even rope the horse he wanted—to say nothing of the times when his loop settled unexpectedly over the wrong victim—Park Holloway, for instance, who once got it neatly under his chin, much to his disgust and the astonishment of Phil.

"I'm going to take my kodak," said Phil. "I like to watch them unload, and I want some more pictures."

"When you've hollered 'em up and down the chutes as many times as I have," Park returned, "you won't need no pictures t' help yuh remember what it's like."

It was an old story to Park, and Thurston's enthusiasm struck him as a bit funny. He perched upon a corner of the fence out of the way, and smoked cigarettes, while he watched the cattle, and shouted pleasantries to the men who prodded and swore and gesticulated at the wild-eyed huddle in the pens. Soon his turn would come—but just now he was content to look on and take his ease.

"For the life of me," cried Phil, sidling gingerly over to him, "I can't see where they all come from. For two days these yards have never been empty. The country will be one vast herd at this rate."

"Two days—huh! this thing will go on for weeks, m'son. And after all's over, you'll wonder where the dickens they all went to. Montana is some bigger than you realize, Bud. And next fall, when shipping starts, you'll think you're seeing raw porterhouse steaks for the whole world—and yuh won't be so far off, neither. Let's drift out uh this dust; you'll have time t' get a carload uh pictures before our bunch rolls in."

As a matter of fact, it was two weeks before the Lazy Eight consignment arrived. Phil haunted the stock yards with his kodak, but after the first two or three days he took no pictures. For every day was but a repetition of those that had gone before. A great, grimy engine shunting cars back and forth on the siding; an endless stream of weary young cattle flowing down the steep chutes into the pens; from the pens to the branding chutes, where they were burned deep with the mark of their new owners; then out through the great gate—crowding, pushing, wild to flee from restraint, yet held in and guided by the cowboys; out upon the green prairie, where they could feast once more upon sweet grasses, and drink their fill from the river of clear mountain water; then out on the weary march of the trail—on and on, for long days, until some boundary, which their masters hailed with joy, was passed—perhaps a river, which they must swim—and they were left free, at last, to roam at will over the wind-brushed range land, to lie down in some cool, sweet-scented swale and chew their cud in peace. And of all the chapters of the story, Phil Thurston was proudly learning the first; as to the others, they would come in good time.

Two weeks, and then came a telegram for Park. And in the reading of it he shuffled off his attitude of boyish irresponsibility, and became, in a breath, the cool, business-like leader of men.

Holding the envelope still in his hand, he sought out Phil, who was practicing with a rope. As Park approached him, Phil whirled the noose and cast it neatly over the peak of the night hawk's tepee.

"Good shot," Park encouraged, "but I'd advise yuh t' take another target. You'll have the tent down over Scotty's ears—and then you'll think yuh stirred up a mess uh hornets.

"Say, Bud, our cattle are coming, and I'm going t' be short uh men. I counted on picking up enough here, but they're darned scarce. So if you want a job, I'll take yuh on, and take chances on licking yuh into shape. You're dead anxious t' wise up on all the know-how, and right here's your chance. I don't reckon the wages'll appeal to yuh—it's forty dollars a month, straight time—but there'll be heaps uh valuable experience." Park lowered an eyelid toward the cook tent, although no one was visible.

Thurston coiled the rope with a certain degree of dexterity, and studied briefly the matter. "I believe I'll take the job, Park—if you think I can hold it down." Phil's speech would have astonished Reeve-Howard, who had always known him for something of a purist in language.

"Well," Park retorted, "it'll be your own funeral if yuh get fired. Better stake yourself to a pair uh chaps; you'll need 'em."

"Also a large, rainbow silk handker-

chief, if I want to look the part," bantered Phil.

"If yuh don't want your darned neck blistered, yuh mean," Park flung over his shoulder. "Your wages and schoolin' starts in to-morrow."

It was early in the morning when the first train arrived—hungry, thirsty, tired, bawling a general protest against fate. Phil, with a long pole in his hand, stood on the narrow plank near the top of a chute wall and prodded vaguely at an endless, moving incline of backs. Incidentally, he took his cue from his neighbors, and shouted till his voice was a croak—though he could not see that he accomplished anything either by his prodding or his shouting.

Below him surged the sea of hide and horns—which was barely suggestive of the animals as individuals. Out in the corrals the dust-cloud hung low, just as it had hovered every day for more than two weeks; just as it would hover every day for two weeks more. Across the yards, near the big, outer gate, Deacon Smith's crew was already beginning to brand. The first train was barely unloaded when the second trailed in and out on the siding—and so the third. Then came a lull, for the consignment had been split in two and the second section was several hours behind the first.

Phil rode out to camp aching with the strain and ravenously hungry. He had not learned the art of taking his work easily and making every move count something accomplished, as did the others. Besides, he had been in constant fear of losing his hold on the fence and plunging headlong among the trampling hoofs below—but he was careful to give no hint of that fear. He had learned a few things, and one was to keep his troubles to himself; cowboys do not take kindly to the man who whines.

When he went back into the dust and the roar, Park ordered him to tend fire, since both crews would brand that afternoon, so as to clear the corrals and get the cattle out upon grass as soon as possible.

Phil mentally thanked Park; tending a branding fire seemed to him mere child's play—or what the boys would call a "snap."

Soon the gray dust-cloud took on a shade of blue in places, where the smoke from the fires cut through; a new tang smote the nostrils—the rank odor of burning hair and searing hide; a new note crept into the roar—a low-keyed blat of pain and fright.

Thurston turned away his head from the sight and smell, and piled on wood until Park stopped him with: "Say, Bud, we ain't celebrating any 'lection! It ain't a bonfire we want, it's *heat*. Just keep her going, and save wood all yuh can."

After an hour of fire tending, Phil thought that "hollering 'em down the chutes" wasn't so bad, after all. His eyes were smarting intolerably with smoke and heat, and the smell of the branding was not nice. But he had grit, and plenty of it. All that weary afternoon he stuck to his work, shrewdly guessing that the others were having no fun either. Park and "the deacon" worked as hard as any of their men, branding the steers as they were squeezed, one by one, fast in the little branding chutes.

The setting sun shone redly through the smoke before Thurston kicked the half-burned sticks apart and poured water upon them, as directed by Park.

"Think yuh earned your little old dollar and thirty-three cents, Bud?" his tawny-haired overseer asked him, and Phil smiled a tired, sooty smile, that seemed all teeth, like the smile of a negro.

"I hope so; at any rate, I have a deep, inner knowledge of the joys of branding," he sighed.

"Wait till yuh burn Lazy Eights on wriggling, blatting calves for two or three hours at a stretch, before yuh talk about the joys uh branding." Park rubbed eloquently his aching biceps.

At dusk Phil crept into his blankets feeling that he would like the night to be at least thirty-six hours long. He was just settling into a luxurious dream-chair, preparatory to telling Reeve-Howard his Western experi-

ences, when Park's voice bellowed into the bed-tent:

"Roll out, boys—we got a train pulling in."

Thurston promptly "rolled out" with the others, though the sudden transition from dream to reality was somewhat bewildering. However, he managed to find his clothes in the dark and get into them, and went out into the open not much behind the others.

There were long hours at the chutes, prodding down at a wavering line of moving shadows, while the "big dipper" hung bright in the sky, and lighted lanterns bobbed back and forth along the train, waving signals to one another. At intervals Park's voice cut crisply through the turmoil, giving orders to men whom he could not see.

The east was brightening to a pale yellow when the men climbed at last into their saddles and galloped out to camp for a hurried breakfast. Phil comforted his aching body with the assurance of rest and sleep. But three thousand cattle were milling impatiently in the stock yards, and a cowboy's first thought is for the animals in his care. So Phil presently found himself patiently fanning a sickly little blaze with his hat, while he endeavored to keep the smoke from his tired eyes. Of a truth, Reeve-Howard would have stared at sight of him.

Once Park, passing by, smiled grimly and said: "Here's where yuh grow wise t' the cow business, Bud." But Phil was too busy to answer.

Three thousand cattle to be branded! The end seemed far off, indeed, to Phil, watching the animals being crowded into the branding chute, squeezed tight between the bars, seared with a dull-glowing Lazy Eight iron and released for the next in line. And yet each passing minute counted something done, and the seemingly interminable procession was sent through faster than he would have believed.

That night, one Philip Thurston slept as sleeps the dead. He might have been picked up bodily and kidnaped without his knowledge, had he been worth the taking.

When he went out on day herd the next afternoon, he fancied he was getting into the midst of things and taking his place with the veterans. He would have been filled with resentment had he suspected that Park carefully eased the first days of his novitiate, but it was a fact well known to everyone but Phil. That was why none of the night guarding fell to him until they had left Billings many miles behind them.

On the third night he was detailed to stand with Bob McGregor on the middle guard, which lasts from eleven o'clock until two. The outfit had camped near the head of a long, shallow basin, which had a creek running through. Down the winding banks of it lay the camps of seven other outfits, with their herds feeding hungrily upon the sweet young grasses. Phil mourned because the light had been too poor, when they arrived that evening, for a picture, and wondered if they would all be there next morning when the sun got up nicely.

"Aw, they'll be miles away by then," Bob told him. "You're sure daffy on shooting everything in sight. By the signs, Bud, you can take your snaps by lightning in another hour. Got your slicker?"

Phil said he hadn't, and Bob shook his head prophetically. "When you're dead onto your job, you'll ride with your slicker behind yuh, rain or shine. They'll likely need singin', too, tonight."

Phil made no reply, which was a way he had of concealing the worst of his ignorance, and Bob gave him minute directions about riding around the herd, and how to turn a stray animal back without disturbing the others.

The relief met them silently and rode away to camp. Off to the right, an animal coughed, and a black shape stepped out of the shadows. Bob swung toward it, and the shape melted into the black shade of the "bunch." Bob motioned to the left. "You can go that way—and sing something, or whistle, so they'll know what yuh are." His tone was subdued, as it had not been before. He rode away, and soon his voice rose,

away across the herd, singing. As he drew nearer, Phil caught the words—at first disjointed and indistinct, then plainer as they met. It was a song he had never heard before, because its first popularity had swept below his social plane.

She's o-only a bird in a gilded cage,
A beau-ti-ful sight to see-e-e;
You may think she seems ha-a-py and free
from ca-a-re——

The singer had passed on into the darkness, and only the high notes floated across to Phil, who whistled softly snatches of "Faust," while he listened; then, as they neared on the second round, the words came pensively:

Her beau-ty was so-old, for an old man's go-old,
She's a bird in a gil-ded ca-age.

Phil rode slowly, like one in a dream, and the lure of the range land was strong upon him; the deep breathing of three thousand cattle, the strong, animal odor, the black night, which grew each moment blacker, and the rhythmic ebb and flow of the clear, untrained voice of a cowboy singing to his charge. If he could put it into words—if he could but paint the broody stillness, with frogs *cr-ekk*-ing along the reedy creek bank, and a coyote yapping shrilly upon a distant hilltop! From the southwest came mutterings half defined, yet ominous. A breeze whispered things to the grasses as it crept away down the valley.

I stood in a churchyard, just at ee-eve,
While the sunset ador-ned the west——

It was Bob, drawing close out of the night. "You're doing fine, kid; keep 'er a going," he commended, as he passed; and Phil moistened his unaccustomed lips and took up "Faust" where he had left off.

Fifteen minutes exhausted his memory of the whistleable parts, and he was not given to tiresome repetitions. He stopped for a moment, and Bob's voice, away to the right, chanted admonishingly, "Keep 'er a go-o-o-ing, Bud, old bo-o-oy." So Phil took a long breath and began "The Holy City"; and at thought of the use to which he was putting the air, felt an impulse to laugh—only that it would, perhaps, have frightened the cattle had he yielded.

"Say," Bob began, when he came near enough, "do yuh know the words uh that piece? It's a peach; I wish't you'd sing it."

Phil laughed and obeyed, while the high-piled thunder heads rumbled deep accompaniment, like the resonant lower tones of a bass viol.

Last night I lay a-sleeping, there came a dream so fair;
I stood in old Jerusalem, beside the temple there——

A steer stepped restlessly out of the herd, and Phil's horse, trained to the work, of his own accord turned him gently back.

I heard the children singing, and ever, as they sang,
Methought the voice of angels from Heav'n in answer rang.

From the west the thunder boomed, drowning the words in its deep-throated growl.

Jerusalem, Jerusalem, lift up your gates and sing——

"Hit 'er up a little faster, Bud, or we'll lose some. They're getting on their feet with that thunder."

Sunfish, in answer to Phil's touch on the rein, quickened to a trot. The jogging was not conducive to the best vocal expression, but Phil persevered.

Hosanna in the *high*-est,
Hosanna to your King!

Flash! the lightning cut through the storm, and Bob, who had contented himself with a subdued whistling while he listened, took up the refrain.

Jerusalem, Jerusalem——

It was as if a battery of heavy field pieces boomed overhead. The entire herd was on its feet and stood close-huddled, their tails to the coming storm. Now the horses were loping steadily in their endless circling—a pace they could hold for hours, if need be. For one blinding instant Phil saw far down the valley; then the black curtain dropped as suddenly as it had lifted.

"Keep a-hollerin', Bud!" came com-

mand, and after, Bob's voice trilled high above the thunder growl:

Hosanna in the *high*-est,
Hosanna to your King!

A strange thrill of excitement came to Thurston. It was all new to him; for his life had been sheltered from the rages of nature; he had never before been out under the night sky when it was as threatening as now. He flinched when came an ear-splitting crash that once again lifted the black curtain and showed him, white-lighted, the plain. In the dark that followed came a rhythmic thud of hoofs, far up the creek, and the rattle of living castanets. Sunfish threw up his head and listened, his muscles a-quiver.

"There's a bunch a-running," called Bob, from across the frightened herd. "If they hit us, give Sunfish his head; he's been there before—and *keep on the outside!*"

Thurston yelled "All right," but the pounding roar of the stampede drowned his voice. A whirlwind of frenzied steers bore down upon him—twenty-five hundred Panhandle two-year-olds, though he didn't know it then. In truth, his mind was pretty much a daze, with one sentence zigzagging through it, like the lightning over his head: "Give Sunfish his head—and *keep on the outside!*"

That was what saved him, for he had the sense to obey. After a few minutes of breathless racing with the roar as of breakers in his ears, and the crackle of clashing horns and the gleaming of rolling eyeballs close upon his horse's heels, he found himself washed high and dry, as it were, as the tumult swept by. He was galloping along behind, and wondering dully how he got there. Surely it was through no skill of his own.

In his story of the West—the one that had "failed to be convincing"—he had told of a stampede. It had not sounded like this one. He wondered if he should ever again feel qualified to write of these things.

Great drops of rain pounded him on the back as he rode—chill drops, that wet to the skin. He thought of his new, canary-yellow slicker in the bed-tent, and before he knew it swore just like any other man would under the circumstances. It was the first real, able-bodied oath he had ever uttered.

Presently he heard a man's voice calling something to him, and distinguished the dim shape of a rider close by. He shouted that password of the range, "Hello!"

"What outfit is this?" the man cried again.

"The Lazy Eight," Phil answered, feeling the thrill of temporary authority. "What in hell are you up to?" If Park could have heard him say that—or Reeve-Howard!

CHAPTER V.

Down the long length of the valley they swept, gathering to themselves other herds and other riders as incensed as were themselves. It is not pretty work, or amusing, to gallop madly in the wake of a stampede at night, keeping the stragglers up and taking the chance of a broken neck, with the rain to make things worse.

Bob McGregor sought Phil with shoutings, and, having found him, they rode side by side. And always the thunder boomed over their heads; and by the lightning flashes they glimpsed the turbulent sea of cattle fleeing, they knew not where or why, with blind fear crowding their heels. The noise of it roused the camps as they thundered by; fortunately, the tents were pitched close to the stream and out of the track of the maddened herds. Men rose up, peered out from the bed-tents as the stampede swept past, cursed the delay it would probably make, told one another that they hoped none of the boys got hurt, and went back to bed to wait for daylight.

When Sunfish stumbled into a shallow washout, between flashes, and Phil sailed unbeautifully over his head, Bob pulled up and slid off his horse in a hurry.

"Yuh hurt, Bud?" he cried, anxiously, bending over him. Phil, for the very

frankness of his verdant ignorance, had won for himself the indulgent protectiveness of the outfit; not a man but watched over him and smoothed his path—and Bob McGregor went further, and loved him whole-heartedly. His voice, when he spoke, was unequivocally frightened.

Phil sat up and wiped a handful of mud out of his mouth. If it had not been too dark to see clearly, Bob would have shouted at the spectacle. "I'm 'kinda sorter shuck up, like,'" Phil quoted, ruefully. "And my nose is skinned, thank you. Where's that devil of a horse?"

Bob stood over him and grinned. "I'm s'prised at yuh, Bud! What would your Sunday-school teacher say if she heard yuh? Anyway, yuh ain't got any call t' cuss Sunfish—he wasn't t' blame; he's used t' fellows that can ride."

"Shut up!" Phil commanded, recklessly. "I said worse than that a while ago—only you didn't happen to overhear me. I'd like to see you ride a horse when he's upside down!"

"Aw, come on!" urged Bob, giving up the argument. "Don't set there chewing the rag—we'll be plumb lost from the herd if we don't hustle."

Phil got into the saddle again, and they went on, riding by sound and the rare glimpses the lightning gave them as it flared through the storm, away to the east.

"Wet?" Bob sang out, sympathetically from the streaming shelter of his slicker; and Phil, wriggling away from his soaked clothing, grunted a sarcastic negative.

The cattle were drifting slowly now before the storm, which had settled to a monotonous downpour. The riders —two or three men for every bunch that had joined in the panic—circled, a veritable picket line, without the password. There would be no relief ride out to them that night, and they knew it, and settled themselves philosophically to make the best of it.

Phil took up his station next to Bob, and rode till he met the next man, when he turned and retraced his steps until he faced Bob again; rode until the world seemed unreal and far off, with nothing left but the endless riding back and forth upon his beat, while the rain oozed through his clothes and trickled uncomfortably down inside his shirt collar. He lost all count of time, and was startled when at last came gray dawn.

As the light grew brighter, his eyes widened and forgot their sleep hunger. He had not thought it would be just like this; he was riding part way across one end of a herd larger than his imagination had ever pictured. Three thousand in a bunch had seemed to him a multitude; yet here were more than twenty thousand—wet, draggled, their backs humped miserably from the rain which but a half hour since had ceased. He was still gazing and wondering when Park rode up to him.

"Lord! Bud, you're sure a sight! Did the bunch walk over yuh?" he greeted.

"No, only Sunfish," Phil answered, shortly. The polish of polite society rubs off the best of us with rough usage. Time was when Philip Thurston would not have answered any man abruptly, however great the provocation. He was only lately getting down to the real man of him; to the son of Bill Thurston—bull-whacker, prospector, follower of dim trails.

He rode silently back with Bob to the camp—five miles away it was—ate his breakfast, got into some dry clothes and went out and tied his slicker deliberately and securely behind the cantle of his saddle, although the sun was shining straight in his eyes and the sky fairly twinkled, it was so clean of clouds.

Bob watched him with eyes that laughed, and when Phil had finished, he went over and slapped him on the shoulder. "My, you're an ambitious son-of-a-gun," he chuckled. "And you've got the slicker question settled in your mind, I see; yuh learn easy—it takes two or three soakin's t' learn some folks."

"We've got to go back and help with the herd, haven't we?" Phil asked. "The horses are all out."

"Yep. They'll stay out, too, till noon.

m'son. We hike t' bed, if anybody should ask yuh."

So it was not until after dinner that Phil rode back to the herd—with his kodak in his pocket—to find the cattle split up into several bunches. The riders at once went to work separating the different brands. He was too green a hand to do anything but help hold the "cut," and that was so much like ordinary herding that his interest flagged. He wanted, more than anything, to ride into the bunch and single out a Lazy Eight steer, skillfully hazing him down the slope to the "cut," as he saw the others do. But that was work for the "top hands," who knew brands as he knew his *a b c's;* so he had to be content with a more humble station.

Bob told him it was the biggest mix-up he had ever seen—and Bob had ridden the range in every State where beef grows wild. He was in the thickest of the huddle, was Bob, working as if he didn't know the meaning of fatigue. Phil, watching him thread his way in and out of the restless, milling herd, only to appear unexpectedly at the edge with a steer just before the nose of his horse, rush it out of the main bunch—wheeling, darting this way and that, as it tried to dodge back—and always coming off victor, wondered if he could ever learn to do it.

Being in pessimistic mood, he told himself he would probably always remain a greenhorn, to be borne with and coached and given boy's work to do—and all because he had been cheated of his legacy of the dim trails, and forced to grow up in a city, hedged about all his life by artificial conditions, his conscience wedded to convention.

It showed the stuff he was made of, that he was careful to do the despised "boy's work" well—and never once let an animal break back into the herd; which was doing very well, for a beginner.

CHAPTER VI.

The long march was nearly over. Even Phil's eyes brightened when he saw, away upon the skyline, the hills that squatted behind the home ranch of the Lazy Eight. The past month had been one of rapid living under new conditions, and it seemed only a few days since he first glimpsed those hills and the truly bachelor household in the coulee below.

As the travel-weary herd swung down the long hill into the valley of the Milk River, stepping out briskly as they sighted the cool water in the near distance, the past month dropped away from Thurston, and what had gone just before came back fresh as the happenings of the morning. There was the Stevens ranch, a scant half mile down the river from where the tents already gleamed on their last camp of the long trail; the smoke from the cook-tent told of savory meats and puddings and things, the bare thought of which made one hurry his horse.

Phil's eyes dwelt longest upon the Stevens house, half hidden among the giant cottonwoods, and he wondered if Mona would still smile at him with that unpleasant uplift at the corner of her mouth. She would not be likely to get the chance to smile at him in any fashion, however, for he certainly would not court a rebuff; he was not that kind.

He wondered if those train robbers had been captured, and if the one Park wounded was yet alive. He shivered when he thought of the dead man in the aisle, and hoped he might never witness another death. Involuntarily he glanced down at his right stirrup, half expecting to see his boot red with human blood. It was not nice to remember that scene, and he gave his shoulders an impatient hitch and tried to think of something else.

Mindful of his vow, he had bought a gun in Billings, but he had not yet learned to hit anything he aimed at. Firearms are hushed in round-up camps, except when dire necessity breeds a law of its own; range cattle do not take kindly to the popping of pistols. So Phil's revolver was yet unstained with powder grime, and was packed away inside his bed. He was telling himself that he would go up on the hill back of the Lazy Eight corrals, and shoot until

even Mona must admire his marksmanship, when Park galloped up to him.

"The world has moved some while we was gone," he announced, in the tone of one who has news to tell and enjoys thoroughly the telling. "Yuh mind the fellow I laid out in that hold-up? He got all right again, and they stuck him in jail along with another one old Lauman glommed a week ago. They didn't do a thing, last night, but knock a dep'ty on the head, swipe his gun, steal a Winchester and a box uh shells out uh the office and hit the high places. Old Lauman—he's the sheriff—is hot on their trail with a posse, but he ain't met up with 'em, that anybody knows of. They say the dep'ty's about all in; they smashed his skull with a big iron poker."

"I wish I could handle a gun," Phil said between his teeth. "I'd go after them myself. I wish I'd been left to grow up out here, where I belong. I'm all West but the training. I ought to ride and rope and shoot with the best of you—and I don't know anything but books and golf, and a lot of silly stuff that doesn't count for anything among *my* people." It was his inner protest against fate, put impulsively into words.

Park only laughed at him. "Aw, go easy," he remonstrated. "What if yuh can't do the double-roll? Riding and shooting and roping's all right—we couldn't very well get along without them accomplishments; but that's all they are—just accomplishments. There's other earmarks we know *men* by, m'son. What yuh want t' do, kid, is t' get that story book West out uh your mind, and look at us the way we are. You've got us all out uh focus by trying t' see us the way yuh've read we're like. We know a *man* when we see him, and it don't matter t' us whether he can ride a bronk straight up, or don't know which way the saddle sets on a horse. If he's a *man* he gets just as square a deal as we can give him." Park was not accustomed to lengthy speeches, and reached for his cigarette book. "And as for hunting outlaws," he finished, "we've got old Lauman t' do that, and he's dead onto his job. When he goes out after a man, he'll come pretty near getting him, m'son. But I sure wish I'd killed that geeser while I was about it; 'twould a-saved Lauman a lot uh hard riding."

Phil could scarcely explain to Park that his desire to hunt train robbers was born of a half-defined wish to vindicate to Mona Stevens his courage, and so he said nothing at all. He wondered if Park had heard her whisper that day, and knew how he had failed to meet the situation. He had often wondered that; but Park had a way of keeping things to himself, and Phil could never quite bring himself to ask him. At all events, if Park knew, he did not despise him for it, and that was some comfort. Women, he told himself, bitterly, are never quite just to a man. If he must be judged, give him men to hear his case and pass judgment.

After the four o'clock supper, he and Bob McGregor went up the valley to relieve the men on herd. There was one nice thing about Park as a foreman—he tried to pair off his crew according to their congeniality. That was why Phil generally stood guard with Bob, whom he liked better than any of the crew—always excepting Park himself.

"I brought m' gun along," Bob told him, apologetically, when they were left to themselves. "It's a habit I've got when I know there's bad men rampagin' around the country. The boys kinda give me the laugh, when they seen me haul it out uh m' war bag—but I just told 'em t' go t' thunder."

"Do you think those——"

"Naw. 'Course not. I just pack it on general principles, same's an old woman packs her umbrell'. Say, this is dead easy! The bunch is pretty well broke, ain't it? I'm sure glad t' see old Milk River again; this here trailing cattle gets blame monotonous." He got down and settled his back comfortably against a rock. Below them spread the herd, feeding quietly.

"Yes, sir, this is sure a snap," Bob repeated, after he had made him a smoke. "They's only two ways the bunch could drift, if they wanted to—

which they don't—up the river or down. This hill's a little too steep for 'em t' tackle, unless they was crowded hard. Good feed here, too.

"Too bad yuh don't smoke, Bud. There's nothing like a good, smooth rock t' your back, and a cigarette in your face, on a nice, lazy day like this is. It's the only kind uh day herding I've got any use for."

"I'll take the rock to my back, if you'll just slide along and make room," Phil answered. "I don't hanker for a cigarette—but I do wish I had my kodak."

"Aw, t' 'ell with your kodak!" Bob snorted. "Can't yuh carry this layout in your head? I've got a picture gallery in mine that I wouldn't trade for a farm; I don't need no kodak in mine, thank ye. You just let this here view soak into your system, Bud, where yuh can't lose it."

Phil did. Long after, he could close his eyes and see it in every detail. The long, green slope, with hundreds of cattle loitering in the rank grass growth, the winding sweep of the river and the green, rolling hills beyond; and Bob, leaning against the rock beside him, smoking luxuriously with half-closed eyes, while their horses dozed with drooping heads a rein-length away.

"Say, Bud," Bob's voice drawled, sleepily, "I wish't you'd sing that Jerusalum song. I want t' learn the words to it; I'm plumb stuck on that piece. It's diff'rent from the general run uh songs, don't yuh think? Most of 'em's about fellows being stuck on some girl that marries the other man—and they make a fellow kinda sick to his stummick when he's got t' sing 'em two er three hours at a stretch on night guard. This here one sounds kinda grand, and the cattle seems t' like it, for a change."

"The composer would feel flattered if he heard that," Phil laughed. The truth was, he wanted to be left alone to daydream and watch the clouds trail lazily across to meet the hills. But he couldn't refuse Bob anything, so he sat a bit straighter and cleared his throat. And when he came to the refrain, Bob took his cigarette from between his lips and held it in his fingers while he joined his voice lustily to Phil's:

> Jerusalem, Jerusalem,
> Lift up your gates and sing,
> Hosanna in the *high*-est,
> Hosanna to your King!

The near cattle lifted their heads to stare stupidly a moment, then moved a few steps slowly, nosing for the sweetest grass tufts. The horses shifted their weight, rested one leg with the hoof barely touching the earth; twitched their ears at the flies and slept again.

> And once again the scene was changed,
> New earth there seemed to be!
> I saw the Holy City
> Beside the tideless sea——

Tamale lifted his head and gazed inquiringly up the hill; but Bob was not observant of signs just then. He was striving with his recreant memory that he might sing with Phil the words:

> The light of God was on its street,
> The gates were open wide,
> And all who would might enter,
> And no one was denied.

Tamale stirred restlessly, with head uplifted and ears pointed straight before, up the steep bluff; Old Ironsides, Phil's mount, was not the sort to worry about anything but his feed, and paid no attention.

Bob turned and glanced the way Tamale was looking; saw nothing and settled down again on the small of his back.

"He sees a badger, or something," he said. "Go on, Bud, with the chorus."

> Jerusalem, Jerusalem,
> Lift up your gates and sing——

"Lift up yer hands damn quick!" mimicked a voice just behind. "If yuh ain't got anything t' do but lay in the shade of a rock and yawp, we'll borry your cayuses. You ain't needin' 'em, by the looks."

They squirmed around until they could stare into two black gun barrels—and then their hands went up; their faces held a particularly foolish expression that must have been amusing to the men behind the guns.

One of the gun barrels lowered, and

a hand reached out and quietly took possession of Tamale's reins. Then the owner of the hand got calmly into Bob's saddle, and Bob gritted his teeth. Evidently their movements had been planned minutely in advance. Once settled to his liking, he tested the stirrups to make sure they were the right length, and, raising his gun, pointed it at the two in a business-like manner that left no doubt of his meaning. Whereupon the man behind them came forward and appropriated Old Ironsides to his own use.

"Too bad we had t' break up Sunday school," he remarked, ironically. "You can go on with the meetin' now —the collection has been took up." He laughed without any real mirth in his voice, and gathered up the reins. "If yuh want our horses, they're up on the bench. I don't reckon they'll ever turn another cow, but such as they are, you're welcome. Set still, boys, till we get down the hill. One of us'll keep an eye peeled for yuh. So long." They turned at the word and rode warily down the slope.

"Wouldn't that jar yuh?" asked Bob, in deep disgust. His hands went down quickly. In another second he was up and shooting savagely. "Git behind the rock, Bud," he commanded, guardedly.

Just then a rifle cracked, and Bob toppled drunkenly and went limply down.

"My God!" cried Phil, and didn't know that he spoke. He snatched up Bob's revolver and fired shot after shot at the galloping figures. All of them went wild, and the first hit a two-year-old square in the ribs. After that there were no cattle within rifle range.

One of the outlaws stopped, took deliberate aim with the stolen Winchester and fired, meaning to kill; but he miscalculated the range a bit, and Phil crumpled down with a bullet in his thigh. The revolver was empty now, and fell smoking at his feet. So he lay and cursed impotently while he watched the marauders ride out of sight up the valley. When the rank timber growth hid their flying figures, he crawled over to where Bob lay, and tried to lift him.

"Are you hurt?" was the idiotic question he asked him.

Bob opened his eyes and waited a minute, as if to steady his thoughts. "Did I get one, Bud?"

"I'm afraid not," Phil confessed, and immediately after wished that he had lied. "Are you hurt?" he repeated, senselessly.

"Who? Me?" Bob's eyes wavered in their directness. "Don't yuh bother none about *me,*" evasively.

"But you've got to tell me. You—they——" he choked over the words.

"Well—I guess they got me, all right. But don't let that worry yuh, Bud." He tried to speak carelessly, but it was a miserable failure. He did not want to die—did Bob, however he might try to hide the fact.

Phil was not in the least imposed upon. He turned away his head and set his teeth together tight. He did not want to act a fool. All at once he grew dizzy and sick, and lay down heavily till the faintness passed.

Bob tried to lift himself to his elbow; failing that, he put out a hand and laid it on Phil's shoulder. "Did they—git you—too?" he queried, anxiously. "The damn—coyotes!"

"It's nothing; just a leg put out of business," Phil hurried to assure him. "Where are you hurt, Bob?"

"Aw, I ain't no X-ray," Bob retorted, weakly, but gamely. "Somewheres inside uh me. It went in m' side—but the Lord—knows—where it—wound up. It hurts like—the very devil. I wish't —do yuh feel like—finishin'—that song, Bud?"

Phil gulped down a lump that made his throat ache. When he answered, his voice was very gentle. "I'll try a verse or so, old man."

"The last one; that's 'most as good—as church. I—I never went much—on religion—but when a fellow's—dyin'——"

"You're not!" Phil contradicted, fiercely.

"All right, Bud. We won't—fight—over it. Go ahead."

Phil eased his leg to a better position, drew himself up till his shoulders

rested against the rock, and began, with an occasional, odd break in his voice:

> And once again the scene was changed,
> New earth there seemed to be,
> I saw the Holy City
> Beside the tideless sea;
> The light of God was on its street,
> The gates were open wide,
> And all who would might enter.
> And no one was denied.

"Wonder if that applies—t'—bone-headed cow punchers," Bob muttered, drowsily. "'And all—who would——'"

Phil glanced quickly at his face, caught his breath sharply at what he saw there, and dropped his head upon his arms.

And so Park and his men found them in the shadow of the rock.

CHAPTER VII.

When the excitement of the outrage had been pushed aside by the insistent routine of everyday life, Phil found himself thrust from the fascination of range life to the monotony of invalidism, and he was anything but resigned. To be sure, he was well cared for at the Stevens ranch, where Park and the boys had taken him that day, and Mrs. Stevens mothered him as he had never been mothered since he could remember.

Hank Graves rode over nearly every day to sit beside the bed and curse the Wagner gang back to their great, great grandfathers and down to more than the third generation yet unborn, and to tell him the news. On the second visit he started to give the details of Bob's funeral, but Phil would not listen, and told him so plainly.

"All right, then, Bud—I won't talk about it. But we done the right thing by the boy—had the best preacher in Shellanne out, and—oh, well, I'll shut up. I know how yuh feel about it, Bud; he was sure a white boy, if ever there was one, and—ahem! I'd give a thousand dollars, hard coin, t' git m' hands on them Wagners. It would a-been all day with 'em if the boys had a run acrost 'em. I'd a let 'em stay out an' hunt a while longer, but old Lauman'll git 'em, soon er late, and we're late as it is with the calf round-up. Them two weeks yuh waited in Billings set us back a lot. Lauman'll run 'em down—and by the Lord! I'll hire Bowman m'self and ship him out from Helena t' help prosycute 'em! They're dead men if he takes the case against 'em, Bud—and I'll git him, sure, and t' hell with the cost of it. They'll swing fer what they done t' you and Bob, if it takes every hoof I own."

Phil told him he hoped they would be caught, and—yes, hanged; though he had never before advocated capital punishment. But when he thought of Bob, the care-naught, whole-souled fellow——

He tried not to think of him, for the thinking unmanned him. Phil had the softest kind of a heart where his friends were concerned, and there were times when he felt that he could officiate at the Wagners' execution with a relish.

He fought against remembrance of that day; and for sake of diversion, he took to studying the large pastel portrait of Mona which hung against the wall opposite his bed. At first, when he saw it, he laughed at the thought that even the great, still plains of the range land cannot protect one against the seemingly ubiquitous "picture agent." In the parlor, he supposed, there would be crayon pictures of grandmothers and aunts—further evidence of the agent's glibness of tongue.

He was glad that it was Mona who smiled down at him, rather than a grandmother or an aunt. For Mona did smile at him, and the smile was roguish, with little dimply creases at the corners of the mouth, and not in the least unpleasant. If the girl would only look like that in real life, he told himself, a fellow would probably get to liking her a lot. He supposed she thought him a greater coward than ever, now—just because he hadn't got killed. If he had been, he would be a hero, like Bob. Well, Bob *was* a hero; the way he jumped up and began shooting required courage. He had stood up and shot also—he hoped nobody had told Mona about his hitting that steer;

Hank said it died in a little while. Well, when he could walk nicely he'd learn to shoot so that the range stock wouldn't suffer.

After a week of seeing only Mrs. Stevens or sympathetic men acquaintances, he began to wonder why Mona stayed so persistently away. Then one morning she came in to take his breakfast things out. She didn't stay a second longer than was absolutely necessary, and she was perfectly composed, and said "good-morning" in her most impersonal tone. At least, Phil hoped she had no tone more impersonal than that with which to snub him. He decided that she really had beautiful eyes and hair, and after she had gone, he looked up at the picture, told himself that it didn't begin to do her justice, and sighed a bit. If only she would come down off her pedestal of aloofness and be sociable, he thought he might rather enjoy being an invalid.

When he wrote a story about a fellow being laid up in the same house with a girl—a girl with big blue-gray eyes and ripply brown hair—he would have the girl treat the fellow decently, and not in this inhuman manner. She would read poetry to him, and bring him flowers, and do ever so many nice things that would make him hate to get well. He decided that he would write just that kind of story, and he would idealize a bit, and have the fellow in love with the girl; you have to in stories. In real life it doesn't necessarily follow that, because a fellow admires a girl's eyes and hair and wants to be friends with her, he is in love with her. For example, he emphatically was not in love with Mona Stevens. He just wanted her to be decently civil, and to stop holding a foolish grudge against him for not standing up and letting a man shoot him full of holes to please her.

In the afternoon Mrs. Stevens would sit beside him and knit things and talk to him in a pleasantly garrulous fashion. And he would lie and listen to her—and to Mona, singing somewhere. Mona had a good voice, he thought; he wondered if she had ever had any training. Also he wished he dared ask her to please not sing that song about "She's only a bird in a gilded cage"; it reminded him too strongly of Bob.

And then, one day, he hobbled out into the dining room and ate dinner with the family. Since he sat opposite Mona, she had to look at him once in a while, whether she would or no. Phil had a strain of obstinacy in his make-up, and when he decided that Mona should not only look at him, but should talk to him as well, he set himself diligently to attain that end. He was not the man to sit down supinely and let a girl calmly ignore him; so Mona presently found herself talking to him with some degree of cordiality, and, what is more to the point, listening to him when he talked. It is probable that Phil had never tried so hard in his life to win a girl's attention—he had never found it necessary. Phil was the kind of fellow girls like.

It was while he was still hobbling with a cane, and taxing his imagination daily to invent excuses for remaining, that the sheriff and a deputy rode up to the door and asked for shelter for themselves and the two Wagners, who glowered sullenly down from their weary horses. When they had been safely disposed in Phil's bedroom, with one of the ranch hands detailed to guard them, Lauman and his man gave themselves up to the joy of a good meal; their own cooking, they said, got awfully tame—especially when they hadn't anything much to cook and dared not have a fire.

They had come upon the outlaws by mere accident, and it is hard telling which was the more surprised. But Lauman was the quickest man with a gun in all that county—else he would not have been serving his fourth term as sheriff of Valley County. He got the drop and kept it, while his deputy did the rest. It had been a mighty hard chase, he said, and a long one, if you counted time instead of miles. But he had them solid now, and harmless as rattlers when their fangs are fresh drawn. He wanted to get them to Glasgow before people heard of their cap-

ture; he thought they wouldn't be safe if the boys knew he had them.

If he had known that the Lazy Eight round-up had just pulled into the home ranch that afternoon, and that Dick Farney, one of the Stevens men, had slipped out to the corral and saddled his swiftest horse, it is quite possible that Lauman would not have lingered so long over his supper, or drunk his third cup of coffee—with real cream in it—with so great a relish. And if he had known that the Circle Bar boys were camped just three miles away, within hailing distance of the Lazy Eight trail, he would have postponed his after-supper smoke.

As it was, he was sitting, revolver in hand, watching the Wagners give a practical demonstration of their appetites, when Phil limped in from the porch, his eyes darker than usual, and said, quietly:

"There are a host of riders coming, I think, Mr. Lauman. I thought you ought to know."

The prisoners went white, and put down knife and fork. If they had never feared before, plainly they were afraid then.

Lauman's eyes never wavered. "Put the handcuffs back on, Waller," he said. "If you've got a room that ain't easy t' git at from the outside, Mis' Stevens, I'll have t' ask yuh for the use of it, I guess."

Mrs. Stevens had lived in Valley County many years, and had learned how to meet emergencies. "Put 'em right down suller," she told him, briskly. "They's just the trapdoor into it, and the windows ain't big enough fer a cat t' go through. Mona, git a candle fer Mr. Lauman." She turned to hurry the girl, and found Mona at her elbow with a light.

"That's the kind uh women I like t' have around," chuckled Lauman. "Come on, boys; hustle down there, if yuh want t' see Glasgow."

Trembling, all their dare-devil courage sapped from them by Phil's words, they stumbled down the steep stairs and the darkness swallowed them. Then Lauman beckoned to Waller.

"You go with 'em," he ordered. "If anybody but me offers t' lift this trap, shoot! Don't yuh take no chances. Blow out that candle soon's you're located."

It was then that fifty riders clattered into the yard and up to the front door. Phil, standing in the doorway, knew them almost to a man. Lazy Eight boys they were; men who, night after night, had spread their blankets under the tent-roof with him—and with Bob McGregor; Bob, who lay silently out on the hill back of the home ranch, waiting for the last great round-up. They glanced at him in mute greeting and dismounted without a word. With them mingled the Circle Bar boys, as silent and as grim as their fellows. Lauman came up and peered into the dusk; Phil observed that he carried his Winchester unobtrusively in one hand.

"Hello, boys," he greeted, cheerfully. You would never have guessed, only for the rifle, that he knew their errand.

"Hello, Lauman," answered Park, matching him for cheerfulness. "We rode over t' hang them Wagner boys."

Lauman grinned. "I hate t' disappoint yuh, Park, but I've kinda set m' heart on doing that little job m'self. I'm the one that caught 'em—and if you'd follered my trail the last month, you'd say I earnt the right."

"Maybe so," Park admitted, pleasantly, "but we're going t' settle up our own account with 'em. Bob was one of us."

"I'll hang 'em just as dead as you can," Lauman argued.

"But yuh won't do it s' quick," Park flashed back. "They're spoilin' the air every breath they draw. We want 'em, and that settles it."

"Not by a damn sight, it don't! I've never had a man took away from me yet, boys, an' I've been your sheriff a good many years. You hike back t' camp; yuh can't have 'em."

Phil could scarce realize the deadliness of their purpose. He knew them for kind-hearted, laughter-loving young fellows, who would give their last dollar to a stranger if he needed it. This was not his idea of a mob; he had fan-

cied they would howl threats and wave bludgeons, as they did in stories. Mobs always "howled and seethed with passion" at one's doors; they did not stand about and talk sanely, as though the subject was trivial and did not concern them.

But the men were pressing closer, and their very calmness, had he known it, was ominous. Lauman shifted his rifle, ready for instant aim.

"Boys, look here," he began, gravely. "I can't say I blame yuh, looking at it from your standpoint. If you'd a caught these men when yuh was out huntin' 'em, you could a strung 'em up—and I'd likely a had business somewheres else. But now yuh got t' remember *I* brought 'em in, an' they're in my care. I've got t' pertect 'em an' turn 'em over t' the law—and it ain't a question uh whether they d'serve it er not. Yuh ain't going t' git 'em—unless yuh lay me out, an' I don't reckon any of yuh'd do that."

"There's never been a man hung by law in Valley County yet," a voice cried, angrily.

"That ain't sayin' there never will be," Lauman flung back. "Don't yuh worry—they'll git all that's comin' to 'em."

"How about the time yuh had 'em in your rotten old jail, and let 'em get out and run around the country killing off *white* men?" drawled another—a Circle Bar man.

"Now, boys——"

A hand—the hand of a Stevens man—reached out through the doorway and caught his rifle arm. Taken unawares, he whirled and then went down under the weight of men used to "wrassling" calves. Even old Lauman was no match for them, and presently found himself stretched upon the porch with three Lazy Eight boys sitting upon him—which, being inclined to portliness, he found very uncomfortable.

Moved by an impulse he had no name for, Phil snatched the sheriff's revolver from its scabbard. As the heap squirmed pantingly upon the porch, he stepped into the doorway to avoid being tripped. It was the wisest move he could have made, for it put him in the shadow—and there were men of the Circle Bar whose trigger finger would not have hesitated, just then, had he been in plain sight and had they known his purpose.

"Just hold on there, boys," he called, and they could see the shine of the gun barrel. The Lazy Eight boys laughed at him.

"Aw, put it down, Bud," Park admonished. "That's too dangerous a toy for you t' be playin' with—and yuh know damn well yuh can't hit nothing."

"I killed a steer once," Phil reminded him, meekly, whereat the laugh hushed; for they remembered.

"I know I can't shoot straight," he went on, frankly, "but you're taking that much greater chance. If I have to, I'll fire—and there's no telling where the bullet would strike."

"That's right, Bud," Park admitted. "Stand still, boys—he's more dangerous than a gun that ain't loaded. What d'yuh want, m'son?"

"I want to talk to you for about five minutes. I've got a game leg, and I can't fight, but I hope you'll listen to me. The Wagners can't run away—they're locked up, with a deputy standing over them with a gun; and on top of all that, they're handcuffed. They're as helpless, boys, as two trapped coyotes." He looked down over the crowd, which shifted uneasily; no one spoke.

"That's what struck me most," he continued. "You know what I thought of Bob, don't you? And I didn't thank them for the hole they bored through my leg; it wasn't any kindness of theirs that it wasn't higher—they shot to kill. And I'd have killed them with a clear conscience if I could. I tried hard enough. But that was different, you see; that was fair fighting. I don't believe, if I had shot straight as I wanted to, I'd ever have felt a moment's compunction. But now, when they're shackled and unarmed and helpless as babies, I couldn't walk up to them deliberately and kill them—could you?

"It might be done, and done easily. You have Lauman where he can't help

himself, and I'm no good in a fight; you've just got the deputy and two women to deal with. You could drag your men out and hang them, and they couldn't raise a hand to defend themselves. We could do it, boys—but after it was done, and the excitement had passed, I'd have a picture in my memory that I'd hate to look at. I'd have an hour in my life that would haunt me. And so would you. You'd hate to remember how you'd helped kill a couple of men that couldn't fight back.

"Let the law do it, boys. You don't want them to live, and I don't; nobody does, for they deserve to die. But *we* don't want to be the ones. They won't get off—do you know what Graves told me? He said he would bring Bowman from Helena to prosecute them—'and t' hell with the expense!' He said they'd hang, if it took every hoof he owns. I don't know Bowman——"

"We do," Park cut in, and Phil heard a new note in his voice. "He's the lawyer that never lost a case."

"I'm glad to hear it, for he's the man that will prosecute them. Lauman, here, is the man that will be responsible—and I guess, after the chase he's had, we needn't be afraid they'll escape again. And it's as Mr. Lauman says, he'll hang them quite as dead as you can. He's paid to do those things—make him earn his money. It's a nasty job, boys, and you wouldn't get anything out of it but a nasty memory."

A hand that did not feel like the hand of a man rested for a delicious instant on his arm. Mona brushed past him and stood where the rising moon could shine on her hair and into her big blue-gray eyes.

"I wish you boys would please go away," she said. "You are making mamma sick. She's got it into her head that you are going to do something awful, and I can't convince her you're not. I told her you wouldn't do anything so *sneaking*, but she's awfully nervous about it. Won't you please go, right now?"

They looked sheepishly at one another; every man of them feared the ridicule of his neighbor.

"Why, sure we'll go," cried Park, rallying. "We were going, anyway, in a minute. Tell your mother we was just congratulatin' old Lauman on winning out. Come on, boys—let's split the breeze. Yuh want t' hurry up and get well, Bud; the Lazy Eight misses yuh."

The three who were sitting on Lauman got up, and he gave a relieved grunt. "Gosh a-mighty, boys!" he groaned, "yuh don't have no mercy on the supper I just got away with. Next time yuh want t' congratulate me, I wisht you'd put it in writin' an' send it b' mail."

The mob laughed and rode away into the moonlight.

CHAPTER VIII.

"That was *your* victory, Miss Stevens. Allow me to congratulate you." If Phil showed any ill grace in his tone, it was without intent. But it did seem unfortunate that, just as he was waxing eloquent, and felt sure of himself and something of a hero, Mona should push him aside as though he were of no account and disperse the mob with half a dozen words.

She looked at him with her direct, blue-gray eyes, and then smiled. And her smile had no unpleasant uplift at the corner; it was the dimply, roguish smile of the pastel portrait—only forty times nicer. He could hardly believe it; he just opened his eyes wide and stared. When he came to, Mona was back in the kitchen washing the supper dishes, just as though nothing had happened—unless one observed the deep apple-red of her cheeks—while her mother, who showed not the faintest symptoms of nervous collapse, flourished a dish towel made of a bleached flour sack, with the stamp showing a faint pink and blue XXXX across the center.

"I knew all the time they wouldn't do nothing when it come right to the point," she declared. "Bless their hearts, they thought they would—but they're too soft-hearted. If yuh go at 'em right, you can talk 'em over easy. It done me good t' hear yuh talk up to

'em, Bud." Mrs. Stevens had called him Bud from the first. "That's all under the sun they needed—just somebody t' set 'em thinking about the other side. You're a real good speaker; seems t' me you ought t' study and be a preacher."

Phil's face turned red, until he forgot everything but his amazement. For Mona the dignified, Mona of the scornful eyes and the chilly smile, actually giggled! Giggled like any ordinary girl, and shot him a glance that had in it pure mirth and roguish teasing, and a dash of coquetry that made Phil's knees weaken under him. He sat down and giggled with her, feeling idiotically happy, and for no reason under the sun that he could name.

He had promised his conscience that he would go home to the Lazy Eight in the morning, but he didn't; he somehow contrived, overnight, to invent a brand new excuse for his conscience to swallow or not, as it liked. Hank Graves had the same privilege; as for the Stevens' trio, he blessed their hospitable souls for not wanting any excuse whatever for his staying. They were frankly glad to have him there—at least, Mrs. Stevens and Jack were. As for Mona, he was not so sure, but he hoped she didn't mind.

This was the reason inspired by his great desire: He was going to write a story, and Mona was unconsciously to furnish the material for his heroine, and so, of course, he needed to be there so that he might study his subject. That sounded very well to Phil, but to Hank Graves it seemed very funny, for some reason. When Phil told him, very gravely—as became so serious a matter—Hank took a fit of strangling that turned his face a dark purple. Afterward, he explained brokenly that something got down his Sunday throat—and Phil, who had never heard of a Sunday throat, eyed him with suspicion. Hank blinked at him with tears still in his quizzical eyes, and slapped him on the back, after the way of the West—and any other enlightened country where men are not too dignified to be real—and drawled, in a way peculiar to himself:

"That's all right, Bud; you stay right here as long as yuh want to and Mis' Stevens'll let yuh. I don't blame yuh—if I was you I'd want t' spend a lot uh time studyin' this p'ticular brand uh female girl m'self. She's out uh sight, Bud—and I don't believe any uh the boys has got any loop on 'er—though I might name a dozen er two that wouldn't mind havin' one. The range is clear in that direction; you just go ahead an' file yer claim——"

"You're getting things mixed," Phil interrupted, his face unbecomingly red. "I'm not in love with her. I—that is—oh, you don't understand, you see. It's—well, it's like this: If you were going to draw a picture of those mountains, off there, you'd want to be where you could look at them, and—er—study them, don't you see? You wouldn't, necessarily, want to—that is, *own* the mountains, just because you felt they'd make a fine picture. Your interest would be—er—entirely—well, impersonal."

"Uh-huh," Hank agreed, his keen eyes searching Phil's face, amusedly.

"Yes—and so, you see, it doesn't follow that I'm—er—in love, just because—oh, hang the luck, I wish you wouldn't stare that way! You make a fellow feel——"

"Uh-huh," said Hank again, smoothing the lower half of his face with his hand. "You're a mighty nice little boy, Bud—I'll bet Mona thinks so, too—and when yuh git growed up you'll know a heap more'n yuh do now. Well, I guess I'll be movin'; when yuh git that—er—*story* told, you'll come home, I reckon. Be good t' yourself, Bud."

Phil watched him ride off, and then flounced—oh, men *do* flounce, at times, in spirit if not in deed; and there would be no lack of the deed, if only they wore skirts that could rustle indignantly in sympathy of the wearer—to his room. Plainly, Hank did not "swallow" the excuse—any more readily than did his conscience.

To prove the sincerity of his assertion to himself, his conscience and to Hank Graves, Phil straightway got out a thick pad of paper, and sharpened

three lead pencils to an exceeding fine point. Then he sat him down by the window—where he could see the kitchen door, which was the one most used by the family—and nibbled the tip off one of the pencils, like any schoolgirl. For ten minutes he bluffed himself into believing he was trying to think of a title; the flat truth is, he was wondering if Mona would go for a ride that afternoon—and, if so, might he venture to suggest going with her? Now, anyone can see that a man never would find the title to a story in that way.

He thought of the crimply waves in Mona's hair, and pondered what adjectives would best describe it without being commonplace. "Rippling" was too old—though it did seem to hit the case all right. He laid down the pad and nearly stood on his head trying to reach his Dictionary of Synonyms and Antonyms without getting out of his chair. While he was clawing after it—it lay on the floor, where he had thrown it that morning because it refused to write a whole poem for him—he heard some one open and close the kitchen door, and came near kinking his neck trying to get up in time to see who it was. After considerable craning, he decided that it must have been Mrs. Stevens throwing out a basin of water; there was a patch of wet earth where had been dry. He returned to the dictionary, feeling quite a Sherlock Holmes.

"Ripple, to have waves, like running water." (That was just the way her hair looked, especially over the temples and at the nape of her neck—Jove! what a tempting, white neck it was!) Um-m; "Ripple; wave; undulate, uneven; irregular." (Lord, what fools are the men who write dictionaries!) "Antonym—no matter about the antonyms."

The kitchen door slammed. Phil craned again; it was Jack—going to town, most likely. Jack didn't amount to much; he spent his days either just going to town or just having returned. Phil shrewdly guessed that Mrs. Stevens leaned far more upon Mona than she did upon Jack—although one could not justly accuse her of leaning upon anyone. He observed that the men usually looked to her for their orders.

He perceived that the point was gone from his pencil, and proceeded to sharpen it. Then he heard Mona singing in the kitchen, and recollected that Mrs. Stevens had promised him warm doughnuts for supper. Perhaps Mona was frying them at that identical moment—and Phil had never seen anyone fry doughnuts. He caught up his cane and limped out to investigate. That is how much his heart just then was set upon writing a story that would breathe of the plains!

One great hindrance to the progress of the story was the difficulty he had in selecting a hero for his heroine. Hank Graves suggested that he use Park, and even went so far as to supply Phil with considerable data which went to prove that Park would not be averse to figuring in a love story with Mona. But Phil was not what one might call enthusiastic, and Hank laughed his deep, inner laugh when he was well away from the house.

Phil, on the contrary, glowered at the world for two hours after. Park was a fine fellow, and Phil cared a great deal for him, but—— And thus it went. On each and every visit to the Stevens place—and they were many—Hank, learning by direct inquiry that the story still waited for a hero, suggested some fellow whom he had, at one time or another, caught "shining around" Mona. And at each suggestion Phil would draw his eyebrows down till he came near getting a permanent frown.

A love story without a hero, while it would, no doubt, be original and all that, would fail to be convincing. Phil tried heroes wholly imaginary, but he had a trick of making his characters seem very real to himself—and sometimes to other people as well. So that, after a few passages of more or less ardent love-making, he would, in a sense, grow jealous and spoil the story by annihilating the hero thereof.

Heaven alone knows how long the thing would have gone on if he hadn't, one temptingly beautiful evening, reverted to the day of the hold up and

apologized for not obeying her command. He explained, as well as he could, just why he sat petrified with his hands in the air, and intimated that he knew she thought him a coward, and all that.

And then, having brought the thing freshly into her mind, he somehow lost control of his wits and told her he loved her. He told her a good deal, in the next two minutes, which he might better have kept to himself, just then. But a man generally makes a fool of himself once in his life—and it seems the more sensible the man, the more thorough a job he makes of it.

Mona moved a little further away from him, and when she answered she did not choose her words, either. "Of all things," she said, "I admire a brave man and hate a coward. You were a coward that day, and you know it; you've just admitted it. Why, in another minute I'd have had that revolver myself, and I'd have shown you—— But Park got it before I really had a chance. I—I hated to seem spectacular, but it would have served you right. If you had had any nerve, I wouldn't have needed to sit there and tell you what to do. If I ever marry anybody, Bu—— Mr. Thurston, it'll be a man with some nerve."

"Which means that I'm not the one?" Phil asked, evenly.

"I don't know—yet." Mona smiled her unpleasant smile—the one that did not belong in the story Phil was going to write. "You're new to the country, you see. Maybe you've got some nerve; you haven't shown much, so far as I ever saw—except when you talked to the boys that night. But you must have known they wouldn't hurt you, anyway. A man has got to have as much grit as I have—that isn't asking much—or else I'd never marry him in this world."

"Not if you—liked him?" Phil's smile was wistful.

"Not even if I—*loved* him!" Mona declared, and fled into the house.

Phil went straight to the stable and borrowed a horse of Jack, who had just returned from town, and rode home to the Lazy Eight.

When Hank heard that he was back to stay—at least, until he could join the round-up again—he didn't say a word for five full minutes. Then: "Got yer story done?' he drawled, with eyes that twinkled.

Phil was just going upstairs to his old room, and Hank could not swear positively to the reply he got. But he says it sounded exactly like: "Oh, damn the story!"

CHAPTER IX.

Phil, out behind the old horse corral, wiped his revolver, the barrel of which was unpleasantly warm, and carefully reloaded. The box had been packed tight, with a bullet-end up, every other cartridge, in nice precision, just about an hour before; now a few cartridges rattled lonesomely around in the bottom when he dropped the box back into his pocket.

He raised the gun slowly, squinted to windward, after the manner of marksmen spectacularly inclined—Phil fancied it was scientific and made for correct aim—sighted carefully and fired. A squatty tin can, which was labeled "Economy Cream" in gilt lettering, leaped off a rock ten paces away and rolled out of sight into the rank growth of "pigweed."

"Pretty good, Bud," a voice behind him drawled. "That the first time yuh knocked it off? Yuh been bombardin' out here worse 'n a bunch uh Injuns at a sun dance. Yuh better let up a while an' give the atmosphere a rest. Old Zack hollered dinner just now, an' I've been smellin' chicken potpie fer the last hour 'n' a half."

Phil had counted seven flights of the cream can, and told Hank so. He admitted that he had made no account of the times he had missed it altogether, but Hank insisted upon seeing the box. There were just five shells in it. Four in the gun made nine, and the box had held fifty. He did a little mental arithmetic while he strode along the path to the house, and afterward those wrinkles came around his eyes that reminded Phil of the rays from the rising sun in old-fashioned pictures.

"About one in six," he remarked. "That ain't so bad fer the first; still, your dad wouldn't a-been proud uh that record. Your dad, Bud, was about the best shot among us. He couldn't do the 'double roll' an' hit the bull's-eye every whack, like I read about once't, somewheres. Yuh hear a lot about that there 'double-roll' business, but I bet there ain't a man walks God's green earth can cut 'er. Yuh don't want t' let the boys load yuh on that, Bud. They try it on tenderfeet sometimes, but it's just a josh; that there 'double roll' 's a pipe dream. But your dad could *shoot,* an' you c'n learn. Yuh couldn't look s'much like him an' not *be* like him. You keep right on, s' long's the ca'tridges hold out, an' the tin cans, an' you'll git there yet. How's the story?"

Phil frowned. He didn't like to be eternally reminded of that story without a name or hero; he was trying his best to forget it—especially the heroine. He stuffed his hands somewhat sullenly into his pockets.

"I'm not going to finish that story," he answered, slowly, weighing his words as he went along and feeling very world weary and cynical. "I don't think it amounts to much, after all. The plot seems weak, and—er—unsatisfactory."

Hank didn't know a plot from a pontoon, but he did know a few things about young fellows of Phil's age and mettle. "Couldn't make it end up t' suit yuh?" he inquired, guilelessly.

"It wasn't that," said Phil, uneasily; he distrusted Hank most when he looked most innocent. "It was—er—oh, you'd hardly understand; it was a matter of technique."

"No, I guess I don't savvy that," Hank agreed, meekly. "Women critters are chuck full of it, I reckon, and it makes 'em mighty uncertain. Yuh think you've got 'em right into the brandin' chute, an' then they break back, an' next yuh know they're clean back in the main bunch ag'in. It must be a heart-breakin' job t' try an' write one into a story an' have her act consistent."

"It is," Phil replied, with conviction.

"I make it a point t' give 'em the trail m'self," Hank observed. "I c'n manage the cow business, an' not ask no odds of anybody; but when it comes t' women, I pass 'em up. I never knowed it t' fail, old er young, they play hell with a man the minute he begins t' take 'em serious. Mona's a thoroughbred, all right, and them's the hardest kind t' manage. I'm sure sorry she was so full uh technique; she'd be out uh sight—er—in a story." He smoothed his face down with his hand, which was a trick he had when baiting a friend, and led the way into the kitchen, where his hope of the chicken potpie was proving a savory reality.

CHAPTER X.

Weeks slipped by, and to Phil they seemed only a few days. His world weariness and cynicism disappeared the first time he met Mona after he left there so unceremoniously; Mona, not being aware of his cynicism, received him on the old, friendly footing, and seemed to have forgotten that she had ever called him a coward. So Phil forgot it, also—while he was with her.

How he filled in the hours he could scarcely have told. Reeve-Howard wrote, in mildly shocked strain, to ask why he did not return for the amateur auto meet, and assured him that it would be a big affair, and that he must not miss it. Phil mentally agreed with him long enough to begin packing his trunk. When he picked up a book which he had told Mona he would take over to her the next time he went, he stopped and considered.

There was the Wagner trial, coming off next month; he couldn't get out of attending it, for he had been subpœnaed as a witness for the prosecution. He would have to be back for that. And there was the beef round-up going to start before long—he really ought to take that in, else how could he write convincingly about it? There would be some fine chances for pictures, too. And, really, he had got over his auto craze; at any rate, it wasn't worth rushing two-thirds across the continent for,

especially since he must needs rush back again for that trial.

He sat down and wrote a long letter of excuses to Reeve-Howard, and made it quite plain to that gentleman that he couldn't possibly go home just yet. Some of the excuses, by the way, Reeve-Howard, if he was a man of discernment, must have thought rather thin. After that Phil saddled and rode over to the Stevens ranch with the book, leaving his trunk yawning in the middle of the floor.

He wrote a little, in a desultory, haphazard fashion, came near to haunting the Stevens place, and went about the country with Hank. He spent three weeks on the beef round-up. At first he was full of enthusiasm and worked quite as if he had need of the wages. But after two or three big drives the novelty wore off, and nothing remained but a lot of hard work. For instance, standing guard on long, rainy nights when the cattle walked and walked, was neither picturesque nor amusing; nor were the hours that he spent on day herd, when the wind was raw and penetrating and like to blow him out of the saddle; nor standing at the stock-yard chutes, forcing an unwilling stream of rollicky, wild-eyed steers up into the cars that would carry them to Chicago and into the greedy maw of the beef trust.

After three weeks of it Phil awoke, one particularly nasty morning, thanking the Lord that he was not obliged to earn his bread in such strenuous fashion. There was a lull in the shipping because cars were not then available; he promptly took advantage of it and made a bee line for the ranch—and Mona. But Mona was visiting friends in Chinook, and there was no telling when she would be home. Phil owned to himself then that there was no good excuse for his tarrying longer in the West, and that the proper thing would be for him to go home to New York.

He had come to stay two months, and he had stayed five. He could ride and rope like an old timer, and he was perfectly able to put up a stiff gun fight, had the necessity ever arisen—which it did not. He had three hundred and seventy-one pictures of different phases of range life, not counting as many that were overexposed or underexposed or out of focus. (Phil managed to spoil two films, by some means or other, where he made a success of one.)

He had six unfinished stories, in each of which the heroine had big, blue-gray eyes and crimply hair, and the title and bare skeleton of a seventh in which the same sort of eyes and hair would probably develop later. He had proposed to Mona three times, and had been three times rebuffed, though not, it must be owned, with that tone of finality which precludes hope.

He was tanned a fine brown, which became him well, if he had only known it. His eyes had lost the dreamy look of the student, and grown keen with studying objects at long distances. He walked with that peculiar, stiff-legged gait which betrays long hours spent in the saddle, and he wore a silk handkerchief around his neck habitually, and had forgotten the feel of a dress suit.

He answered to the name "Bud" more readily than to his own, and he used the slang and colloquialisms of the plains without any mental quotation marks.

By all these signs and tokens, he had learned his West, and should have taken himself back to civilization when the frost came. He had come to get into touch with his chosen field of fiction, that he might write of it as one knowing whereof he spoke. So far as he had gone, he was in touch with it; he was steeped to the eyes in local color—and there was the rub. The lure of it was strong upon him, and he might not loosen its hold; he was the son of his father; he had found himself, and knew that he loved best to travel the dim trails.

Gene Wasson came in and slammed the door emphatically shut. "She's comin'," he complained, while he pulled the icicles from his mustache and cast them into the fire. "She's going t' be a real old howler, by the signs. What yuh doing, Bud? Writin' po'try?"

Phil nodded assent, with certain mental reservations; the editors never seemed to think it poetry.

"Well, slap in a lot uh things about 'hazy, lazy, daisy days in the spring'—that jingles fine—and green grass and the sun shining and makin' the hills all goldy yellow, and prairie dogs chip, chip, chippin' on the 'dobe flats—prairie dogs would go all right in po'try, wouldn't they? They're sassy little cusses, and I don't know anything that'd rhyme with 'em; but maybe you do. And read it all out t' me after supper. Maybe I c'n forget there's a blizzard on."

"What! Another one?" Phil got up to scratch a trench in the half-inch layer of frost on the cabin window. "Why, the last one only cleared up this morning."

"Can't help that. This is just chapter five uh the same old story. When these here Klondike chinooks gets t' lappin' over each other, they never know when t' quit. Every darn one has got 'to be continued' tacked onto the tail end of it this winter. All the difference is you can't read the writin'. But *I* can.

"I've got some mail for yuh, kid. And old Hank wanted me to ask yuh if yuh'd like t' go t' Glasgow next Thursday, and watch old Lauman start the Wagner boys fer—wherever's hot enough. He can get yuh let in—you being in the writin' business. He say t' tell yuh it's a good chance t' take notes so'st yuh c'n write a real stylish story, with lots uh murder and sudden death in it. We don't hang folks very often out here, and yuh might have t' go back East after pointers, if yuh pass this up."

"Oh, let up! It turns me sick when I think about it—how they looked when they got their sentence, and all that. Where are the letters?" Phil sprawled over the table after them. One was from Reeve-Howard; he put it by. The other had a printed business address in the corner—an address that started his pulse a beat or two faster; for Phil had not yet reached that *blasé* stage where he could receive a communication from one of the "Eight Leading" without the flicker of an eyelash. He still gloated over each little success and was cast into the deeps by the failures.

He held the envelope to the light, shook it, tentatively, like any woman, guessed hastily and hopefully at the contents and then tore off an end impatiently. From the great fireplace Gene watched him curiously and half enviously. He wished *he* could get important-looking letters from New York every few days.

"Gene! You remember that story I read to you one night—that yarn about the fellow that lived alone in the hills, and how the wolves used to come and sit on the ridge and howl—you know, the one you thought was 'out uh sight.' They took it, all right, and—here, what do you think of that?" He tossed the letter over to Gene, who caught it just as it was about to dodge into the flame with the draught.

Phil, in the days which he spent in one of the half dozen Lazy Eight line camps with Gene, down by the river, had been writing of the West—writing in fear and trembling; for now he knew how great was his subject, and his ignorance. In the long evenings, while the fire crackled and the flames played a game they had invented—a game where they tried which could leap highest up the great chimney; while the north wind whoo-ooed around the eaves, and fine, frozen snow meal swished against the little window; while shivering, drifting range cattle tramped restlessly through the sparse willow growth, seeking comfort where was naught but cold, and snow, and bitter, driving wind; while the gray wolves hunted in packs, and had not long to wait for their supper, Phil had written better than he knew. He had sent the cold of the blizzards and the howl of the wolves; he had sent bits of the wind-swept plains back to New York in long, white envelopes. And the editors were beginning to sit up and seize upon his white envelopes, greedy for what was within. Not every day can they look through a few typewritten pages and see the range land spread, now smiling, now frowning, before them.

"Gee! they say here 't they want some more off the same piece, an' at any old price yuh might name. I wouldn't mind writin' stories m'self." Gene kicked a log back into the flame where it would do the most good. His big, square-shouldered figure stood out sharply against the glow.

Phil, watching him meditatively, wanted to tell him that he was the sort of stuff of which good stories are made. But for men like him, strong, purposeful, brave, the West would lose half its charm. He reminded Phil of Bob, and for that Phil liked him, and stayed with him in the line camp when he might have been taking his ease at the home ranch. It was wild and lonely, down there between the bare hills and the frozen river, but the wildness and the loneliness appealed to him. It was primitive and, at times, uncomfortable. He slept in a bunk built against the wall, with hard boards under him and a sod roof over his head. There were times when the wind blew its fiercest and rattled dirt down into his face, unless he covered it with a blanket. And every other day he had to wash the dishes and cook, and when it was Gene's turn to wash dishes, Phil chopped great armloads of wood for the fireplace to eat o' nights. Also he must fare forth wrapped to the eyes, and help Gene drive back the cattle which had drifted into the river bottom, lest they cross the river and range where they should not.

But in the evenings he could sit in the fire glow and listen to the wind and to the coyotes and the gray wolf, and weave stories that even the most hypercritical of editors found convincing. By day he could push the coffee box, that held his typewriter, over by the frosted window, when he had an hour or two to spare, and whang away at a rate which filled Gene with wonder. Sometimes he rode over to the home ranch for a day or two; but Mona was studying music in Great Falls, so he found nothing to keep him there, and drifted back to the little, sod-roofed cabin by the river, and to Gene.

The winter settled down with bared teeth, like a bulldog, and never a chinook came to temper the cold and give man and beast respite. Blizzards that held them close to shelter for days swept down from the north. With them came the drifting herds. By hundreds they came, hurrying miserably before the storms. When the wind lashed them without mercy, even in the bottom land, they pushed reluctantly out upon the snow-crusted ice of the Missouri. Then Phil and Gene, watching from their cabin window, would ride out and turn them pitilessly back into the teeth of the storm.

They came by hundreds—thin, gaunt from cold and hunger. They came by thousands, lowing their misery as they wandered aimlessly, seeking that which none might find—food, and shelter, and warmth.

When the Canada herds pushed down upon them, the boys gave over trying to keep them north of the river. While they turned one bunch, a dozen others were straggling out from shore, the timid following single file behind a leader more venturesome or more desperate than his fellows.

And so the march went on and on: big, long-horned steer grappling the problem of his first northern winter; thin-flanked cow with her shivering, rough-coated calf trailing at her heels; humped-back yearling, with little nubs of horns telling that he was lately in the calfhood; red cattle, spotted cattle, white cattle, black cattle, white-faced Herefords, shorthorns, scrubs; Texas longhorns, of the sort invariably pictured in stampedes—still they came.

Through the shifting wall of the worst blizzard of the season Phil watched the weary, fruitless, endless march of the range.

"Where do they all come from?" he exclaimed once, when the snow veil lifted and showed the river black with cattle.

"Lord, I dunno!" Gene answered, shrugging his shoulders against the pity of it. "I seen some brands yesterday that I know belongs up in the Cypress Hills country. If things don't loosen up pretty soon, the hull darned range'll be swept clean uh stock as far north as

cattle run. I'm lookin' fer reindeer next thing."

"Something ought to be done," Phil declared, uneasily, turning away from the sight. "I've had the bellowing of starving cattle in my ears day and night for nearly a month. The thing's getting on my nerves."

"It's getting on the nerves uh them that own 'em a heap worse," Gene told him, grimly, and piled more wood on the fire; for the cold bit through even the thick log walls of the cabin when the flames in the fireplace died, and the door hinges were crusted deep with ice. "There's going t' be the biggest loss this range has ever knew."

"It's the owners' fault," snapped Phil. His nerves were in that irritable state which called loudly for a vent of some sort. Even argument with Gene, fruitless though it must perforce be, would be a relief. "It's their own fault. I don't pity *them* any! Why don't they take care of their stock? If I owned cattle, do you think I'd take my ease and watch them starve through the winter?"

"No, maybe not, unless yuh had more'n you could feed; it'd be a case uh have to, then. There's fifty thousand Lazy Eight cattle walkin' the range somewheres t'day. How the dickens is old Hank goin' t' feed them fifty thousand? Or five thousand? I tell yuh right now it takes every spear uh hay he's got t' feed his calves. There's plenty outfits don't do that much, as you can see fer yourself. There ain't many Lazy Eight cows got calves taggin' at their heels and suckin' all the life out uh them, t'-day, like yuh see out the window."

"Hank could buy hay," Phil persisted.

"Buy hay fer fifty thousand cattle? Where'd he git it? Say, I guess you don't realize that's some *cattle!* You went straight in the air last spring when yuh seen twenty thousand bunched t'gether, and yuh said yuh never dreamt s' many c'd ever be got t'gether! And here yuh are thinkin' Hank ought t' round up *fifty* thousand, and buy hay for 'em! Reckon it up yerself; it takes a ton and a half t' winter one critter. Why, kid—oh, all ails you is yuh don't savvy the size uh the thing. You c'd skin the hull country clean uh hay, and then not have enough t' go around once. Why, look here! Montana alone ships over a hundred and fifty thousand head uh beef every season—*beef* critters, mind yuh! Now, how many head uh stock do yuh suppose ranges in the State? *I* don't know, and I'd hate like hell t' give a guess; but I ain't afraid t' bet there won't be less than three hundred thousand head cross this river before spring."

"Some of them belong in Canada—you said so yourself," Phil cut in.

"I know it—a hull lot comes from Canada; but yuh want t' recollect we ain't far from the line; there's a lot uh country south of us, Bud. And then look at all the other cow States—Wyoming and Colorado and Arizona and Texas, and—oh, Lord! Why, Bud, when yuh talk about feedin' every cow critter that runs the range, yuh're plumb foolish."

"Men have no business to raise more cattle than they can comfortably feed," Phil argued, doggedly.

"Huh! they ain't, hey? Have yuh ever heard tell of any 'overproduction' uh beef? Ain't there a market—and a darned good market—for every hoof that's shipped? Where would the world git its rare-broiled porterhouse if the West cut down their bunches t' just what they could feed? There'd be a beef famine, sure enough, then—and it'd be worse than the trust c'n make; fer it would be a case uh where yuh can't produce the goods at any price. How comes it a cattleman doubles his money every three or four years, if there's a hoof too many on the range? It ain't as if the business was overcapitalized, like some, and swelled out uh all perportion; it's just the natural increase uh the industry—the natural increase uh the cattle, yuh see. And the natural growth of any business like that ain't going t' be ahead uh the demand fer it."

"Well, there's something wrong *somewhere,*" Phil reiterated, "or these

cattle wouldn't be wandering around, starving by thousands and tens of thousands."

"Sure!" Gene smiled engagingly across at him. "It's the man that makes the weather. I never seen the beat; most winters the stock gits fat and sassy, and the only loss is a few calves and poor cows that'd likely die anyhow. Why, Bud, I've saw steers in spring round-up that was fat enough fer beef; lots of 'em. That don't sound like croolty t' animals, does it? This here buffalo and bunch grass ripens on the stalk, and stock does well on it all winter. It's these cussed blizzards that's playin' hell with 'em. The grass is there, but they can't git at it, and these cold winds keep 'em traveling. I guess the most confirmed 'oldtimer' 'll have t' throw up his hands and own he never seen the like uh this fer a hard winter. We ought t' be havin' chinooks that takes the snow off overnight—but we ain't gettin' 'em, I notice. The range is under fourteen inches uh snow right now, and more comin'; and they say it's twelve feet deep up in the mountains. You'll see some warm old times in the spring, Bud, if yuh stay. You will, won't yuh?"

Phil laughed shortly. "I suppose it's safe to say I will," he answered. "I ought to have gone last fall, but I didn't. It will probably be the same thing over again; I ought to go in the spring, but I won't."

"You bet yuh won't. Talk about big round-ups! What yuh seen last spring wasn't a commencement. Every hoof that crosses this old river and lives till spring 'll have t' be rounded up and brought back ag'in. They'll be scattered clean down t' the Yellowstone, and every northern outfit has got t' go down and help work the range from there back. I tell yuh, Bud, yuh want t' lay in a carload uh films, and throw away all them little, one-horse snap shots yuh got. There's goin' t' be round-ups like these old Panhandle rannies tell about, when the green grass comes." Gene, thinking blissfully of the tented life, sprawled his long legs toward the snapping blaze, and crooned dreamily, while without the blizzard raged more fiercely, a verse from an old camp song:

Out on the round-up, boys, I tell yuh what yuh get—
Little chunk uh bread and a little chunk uh meat;
Little black coffee, boys, chuck full uh alkali,
Dust in your throat, boys, and gravel in your eye!
So polish up your saddles, oil your slickers and your guns—
For we're bound for Lonesome Prairie when the green grass comes.

CHAPTER XI.

One night, late in March, a sullen, far-away roar waked Phil in his bunk. He turned over and listened, wondering what on earth was the matter. More than anything it sounded like a freight train, only the railroad lay many miles to the north, and trains do not run at large over the prairie. Gene snored peacefully, an arm's length away. Outside the snow lay deep on the levels, and in the hollows were great, white drifts that at bedtime had glittered frostily in the moonlight. On the hilltops the gray wolves howled across coulees to their neighbors, and slinking coyotes yapped foolishly at the moon.

Phil drew the blanket up over his ears, for the fire had died to a heap of glowing embers, and the cold of the cabin made his nose tingle. The roar grew louder and nearer; then the cabin shivered and creaked in the suddenness of the blast that struck it, and a clod of dirt plumped down upon his shoulder, bringing with it a shower of fine particles.

"Another blizzard!" Phil groaned to himself. "And the worst we've had yet, by the sound."

The wind shrieked down the chimney and sought the places where the chinking was loose. It howled up the coulees, putting the wolves themselves to shame. Gene flopped over like a freshly landed fish, grunted some unintelligible words and slept again.

For an hour Phil lay and listened to the blast, and selfishly thanked Heaven it was his turn at the cooking. If the storm kept up that lick, he told him-

self, he was glad he didn't have to chop the wood. He lifted the blanket and sniffed tentatively, then cuddled back into cover, swearing that a thermometer would register zero at that very moment on his pillow.

The storm came in gusts, as the worst blizzards do at times. It made him think of the story about the fifth little pig, who built a cabin of rocks, and how the wolf threatened! "I'll huff, and I'll puff, and I'll blow your house down!" It was as if he himself were the fifth little pig, and as if the wind were the wolf. The wolf wind would stop for whole minutes, gather his great lungs full of air, and then, without warning, would "huff and puff" his hardest. But, though the cabin was not built of rocks, it was, nevertheless, a stanch little shelter, and stood sturdily in its place.

He pitied the poor cattle still fighting famine and frost as only range-bred stock can fight. He pictured them drifting miserably before the fury of the wind, or crowding for shelter under some friendly cut bank, their tails to the storm, waiting stolidly for the dawn which would bring no relief. Then, with the roar and the rattle in his ears, he fell asleep.

In that particular line camp, on the Missouri, the cook's duty began with building a fire in the morning. Phil waked reluctantly, shivered in anticipation under the blankets, gathered together his fortitude and crept out of his bunk. While he was dressing his teeth chattered like castanets in a minstrel show. He lighted the fire hurriedly and stood back close before it, listening to the rage of the wind. Phil was growing very tired of the monotony of the winter; he could no longer see any beauty in the high-turreted, snow-clad hills, nor the bare, red faces of the cliffs frowning down upon him.

"I don't suppose you could see to the river's bank," he mused, "and Gene will tear the third commandment to shreds before he gets the water hole open."

He went over to the window, meaning to scratch a peephole in the frost. He lifted a hand, then stopped, bewildered; for, instead of frost, there was only steam, with ridges of ice yet clinging to the sash and dripping water in a tiny rivulet. He wiped the steam hastily away with his palm, and looked out.

"Good heavens, Gene!" he shouted, in a voice to wake the Seven Sleepers. "The world's gone mad overnight. Are you dead, man? Get up and look out. The whole damn country is running water, and the hills are bare as this floor!"

"Uh-huh!" Gene knuckled his eyes and sat up. "Chinook struck us in the night. Didn't yuh hear it?"

Phil opened the door and stood face to face with the miracle of the West. He had seen Mother Nature in many a changeful mood, but never like this. The wind blew warm from the southwest and carried hints of green things growing, and the song of birds; he breathed it gratefully into his lungs and let it riot in his hair. The sky was purplish and soft, with heavy, drifting clouds, high piled, like a summer storm; it looked like rain, Phil thought. The bare hills were sodden with snow water, and the drifts in the coulees were dirt-grimed and forbidding. The great river lay, a gray stretch of water-soaked snow over the ice, with little, clear pools reflecting the drab clouds above. A crow flapped lazily across the foreground and perched, like a blot of fresh-spilled ink, on the top of a dead cottonwood, and cawed raucous greeting to the spring.

The wonder of it dazed Phil and made him do unusual things that morning. All winter he had been puffed with pride over his cooking, but now he scorched the oatmeal, and let the coffee boil over, and blackened the bacon, and committed divers other grievous sins against Gene's clamoring appetite, without compunction. He simply could not stay in the cabin five minutes at a time.

After breakfast he left the dishes unwashed upon the table and went out and made merry with nature. He could scarce believe that yesterday he had frosted his left ear while he brought a bucket of water up from the river, and that it had made his lungs ache to

breathe the chill air. Now the path to the river was black and dry, and steamed with warmth. Across the river cattle were feeding upon the brown grasses that only a few hours before had been locked away under a crust of frozen snow.

"They won't starve now," he cried, pointing them out to Gene.

"No, you bet not!" Gene answered. "If this don't freeze up on us, the wagons'll be starting in a month or so. I guess we c'n be thinkin' about hittin' the trail for home pretty soon now. The river'll break up, if this keeps up a week, and the horse round-up'll start soon's the feed begins t' get good. Say, this is out uh sight! It's warmer outdoors than 'tis in the house. Darn the old shack, anyway! I'm plumb sick uh the sight of it. It looks good t' me in a blizzard, but now—it's me fer the range, m' son." He went off to the stable with long, swinging strides that matched all nature for gladness, singing gayly:

So polish up your saddles, oil your slickers an' your guns,
For we're bound for Lonesome Prairie, when the green grass comes!

Phil did not go on the horse round-up. He explained to the boys, when they clamored against his staying, that he had a host of things to write, and it would keep him busy till they were ready to start with the wagons for the big rendezvous on the Yellowstone—the exact point of which had yet to be decided upon by the Stock Association when it met.

The editors were after him, he said, and if he ever expected to get anywhere—in a literary sense—it behooved him to keep on the smily side of the editors.

That sounded all right, as far as it went, but, unfortunately, it did not go far. The boys winked at one another gravely, behind his back, and jerked their thumbs knowingly toward Milk River. By which pantomime they reminded one another, quite unnecessarily, that Mona Stevens had come home. However, they kept their skepticism from his notice, so that Phil believed his excuses passed on their face value. They realized that it is against human nature for a man to declare openly to his fellows his intention of laying last, desperate siege to a girl who has already refused him three times, and to ask her, for the fourth time, if she will be good enough to marry him.

That is really what kept Phil at the Lazy Eight. His writing became once more a mere incident in his life. During the winter, when he did not see her, he could bring himself to think occasionally of other things; and it is a fact that the stories he wrote with no heroine of any sort hit the mark the straightest.

Now, when he was once again under the spell of big, clear, blue-gray eyes and crimply brown hair, his stories lost something of their virility and verged upon the sentimental in tone. And since Phil was not a fool, he realized the falling off, and chafed against it and wondered why it was. Surely, a man who is in love ought to write well of love, but it is a melancholy fact that he seldom does so. At any rate, Phil didn't. He came near going to the other extreme and refusing to write at all.

The wagons were out two weeks, which is quite long enough for a crisis to arise in the love affairs of a young man. By the time they returned, one Philip Thurston was in pessimistic mood, and quite ready to go with them, the further the better. Also, they couldn't start too soon to please him. His thoughts still ran to blue-gray eyes and crimply hair, but he made no attempt to put them into a story.

He packed his trunk carefully with everything he would not need on the round-up, and his typewriter he put in the middle. He told himself bitterly that he had done with crimply haired girls, and with every other sort of girl. If he could figure in something heroic—only Phil said melodramatic—he might possibly force her to think well of him. But heroic situations do not come every day to a man, and girls who demand that their knights shall be brave in face of death need not complain if they are left knightless at the last.

He wrote to Reeve-Howard, the night

before they were to start, and apologized gracefully for having neglected him during the last three weeks, and told him he would certainly be home in another month. He said that he was "in danger of being satiated with the Western tone" and would be glad to shake the hand of civilized man once more. This was distinctly unfair, for he had no quarrel with the masculine portion of the West. If he had said civilized woman, it would have been more just, and more illuminating to Reeve-Howard, who wondered what scrape Phil had gotten himself into.

For the first few days of the trip, he was in that frame of mind which makes a man want to ride by himself, with shoulders hunched moodily and eyes staring straight before the nose of his horse. But the sky was soft and seemed to smile down at him, and the clouds loitered in the blue of it and drifted aimlessly with no thought of reaching harbor. From under his horse's feet the prairie sod sent up sweet, earthy odors into his nostrils, and the tinkle of the bells in the saddle bunch behind him made music in his ears—the sort of music a true cowboy loves. Yellow-throated meadow larks perched swaying in the top of gray sage bushes and sang to him that the world was good. Curlews circled over him, their long, funny bills thrust out straight, as if to point the way for the body to follow, and cried: "Kor-r-*eck*, kor-r-*eck!*" which means just what the meadow larks sang. So Phil, hearing it all about him, seeing it and smelling it, straightened the hunch out of his shoulders and admitted that it was all true—that the world was good.

At Miles City, which the Stock Association had fixed upon as the place of meeting, he found himself in the midst of a small army—the regulars of the range—which grew hourly larger as the outfits rolled in. The rattle of mess wagons, driven by the camp cook and followed by the bed wagon, was heard from all directions. Jingling cavvies—herds of saddle horses, they were, driven and watched over by the horse wrangler—came out of the wilderness in the wake of the wagons. Phil got his camera and took pictures of the scene. In the first, ten different camps appeared; Phil mourned because two others were left out. Two hours later he snapped the kodak upon fifteen, and there were four beyond range of the lens.

Park came along, saw what he was doing, and laughed. "Yuh better wait till they commence t' *come,*" he said. "When yuh can stand on this little hill and count fifty or sixty outfits camped within two er three miles uh here, yuh might begin t' get your snap shots."

"I think you're loading me," Phil retorted, calmly, winding up the roll for another exposure.

"All right, go ahead, then." Park walked off and left him.

Still they came. From Swift Current to the Cypress Hills, the Canadian cattlemen sent their wagons to join the big meet. From the Sweet Grass Hills to the mouth of Milk River, not a stock grower but was represented. From the upper Musselshell they hurried, and from out the Judith basin; from Shellanne east to Fort Burford. Truly, it was a gathering of the clans such as eastern Montana had never before seen.

For a day and a night the cowboys made merry in the town while their foremen consulted and the captains appointed by the association mapped out the different routes. In times like these, foremen such as Park and "Deacon" Smith were shorn of their accustomed power and worked under orders as strictly as those they gave to their men.

Their future movement thoroughly understood, the army moved down upon the range in companies of five and six crews, and the long summer's work began, each rider a unit in the war against the chaos which the winter had wrought; in the fight of the stockmen to wrest back their fortunes from the wilderness, and to hold once more their sway over the range land.

Their method called for concerted action, although it was simple enough. Two of the Lazy Eight wagons, under Park and Gene Wasson—for Hank, that spring, was running four "wagons"

or crews, and had promoted Gene to be wagon boss of one—joined forces with the Circle Bar, the Flying U and a Yellowstone outfit whose wagon boss, knowing best the range, was captain of the five crews; and drove north, gathering and holding all stock which properly ranged beyond the Missouri. That meant day after day of "riding circle"—which means riding out ten or twelve miles, on both sides of the camp, then turning and driving everything before them to a point near the center of the circle thus formed. When they met, the cattle were bunched, and all stock which belonged on that range was cut out, leaving only those which had crossed the river during the storms of the winter. These were driven on to the next camping place and held—which meant constant day herding and night guarding, work which cowboys hate most of anything.

There would be no calf round-up proper that spring, for the calves were branded as they were gathered. Naturally, after the hard winter, the calf crop was light. Many there were among the she-stock that would not cross the river again—their carcasses made unsightly blots in the coulee bottoms and on the wind-swept levels. Of the calves that had followed their mothers on the long trail, hundreds had dropped out of the march and been left behind for the wolves. But not all. Range-bred cattle are blessed with rugged constitutions, and they can bear much of cold and hunger. The cow that can turn tail to a biting wind while she plows to the eyes in snow, and root out a very satisfactory living for herself, breeds calves that will, in time, do likewise, and grow fat and strong in the doing. He is a sturdy, self-reliant little rascal, is the range-bred calf.

When fifteen hundred head of mixed stock, bearing northern brands, were in the hands of the day herders, Park and his crew were detailed to take them home and turn them loose upon their own range north of Milk River. Phil felt that he had gleaned about enough experience, and more than enough hard riding and short sleeping and hurried eating; he announced that he was ready to bid good-by to the range. He would help take the herd home, he told Park, and then he intended to hit the trail for old New York.

He still agreed with the meadow larks that the world was good, but he tried to make himself believe that he really thought the civilized portion of it was better, especially when there is a girl in the other part who persists in saying no when she should undoubtedly say yes, and insists that a man must be a hero, else she will have none of him.

CHAPTER XII.

It was nearing the middle of June, and it was getting to be a very hot June at that. For two days the trail herd had toiled wearily over the hills and across the coulees between the Missouri and the Milk River. Then the sky threatened for a day, and after that they plodded in the rain.

"Thank the Lord that's done with," sighed Park, when he saw the last of the herd climb, all dripping, up the north bank of the Milk River. "T'-morrow we can turn 'em loose. And I tell yuh, Bud, we didn't git across none too soon. Yuh notice how the river's comin' up? A day later, and we'd a had t' hold the herd on the other side, no tellin' how long."

"It *is* higher than usual; I noticed that," Phil agreed, absently. He was thinking more of Mona, just then, than of the river. He wondered if she would be at home. He could easily ride down there and find out—it wasn't far; not a quarter of a mile—but he assured himself that he wasn't going to. Even if she were at home, what good could that possibly do him? Just give him several bad nights, when he would lie in his corner of the tent and listen to the boys snoring with a different key for every man; such nights were not pleasant, nor were the thoughts which caused them.

From where they had camped, on a ridge which bounded a broad coulee on the east, he could look down upon the

Stevens ranch nestling in the bottom land, the house half hidden among the cottonwoods. Through the last hours of the afternoon he watched it hungrily. The big corral ran down to the water's edge, and he noted idly that three panels of the fence extended out into the river, and that the muddy water was creeping steadily up, until at sundown the posts of the first panel barely showed above the water.

Park came up and looked down upon the little valley. "I never seen any sense in Jack Stevens buildin' where he did," he said. "There ain't a June flood that don't put his corral under water, and some uh these days it's goin' t' git the house. He was too lazy t' dig a well back on high ground; he'd rather take chances on havin' the whole business washed off the face uh the earth."

"There must be danger of it this year, if ever," Phil observed, uneasily. "The river is coming up pretty fast, it seems to me. It must have raised three feet since we crossed this afternoon."

" 'Course there's danger, with all that snow comin' out uh the mountains. And like as not Jack's in Shellanne, roostin' on somebody's pool table, instead uh stayin' at home lookin' after things. Where yuh goin', Bud?"

"I'm going to ride down there," Phil answered, constrainedly, as he swung up into his saddle. "The women may be all alone."

"Well, I'll go along, if yuh'll hold on a minute. Jack ain't got a lick uh sense—I don't care if he *is* Mona's brother."

"Half brother," corrected Phil, for he had a poor opinion of Jack, and resented even that slight relation to Mona.

The road was soggy with the rain, which fell steadily; down in the bottom, the low places in the road were already under water, and the river, widening almost perceptibly in its headlong rush down the narrow valley, crept, inch by inch, up its low banks. When they galloped into the yard, which sloped from the house gently down to the river, fifty yards away, Mona's face appeared for a moment in the window. Evidently she had been watching for some one, and Phil's heart flopped in his chest as he wondered, fleetingly, if it could be himself. When she opened the door, her eyes greeted him with a certain wistful expression that he had never seen in them before. He was guilty of wishing that Park had stayed in camp.

"Oh, I'm glad you rode over," she cried; but she was careful, after that first swift glance, to look at Park. "Jack wasn't at camp, was he? He went to town this morning, and I looked for him back long before now. But it's a mistake ever to look for Jack before he heaves in sight."

Park smiled vaguely. He was afraid it would not be polite to agree with her as emphatically as he would have liked to do.

Phil had no smile ready—polite or otherwise. Instead, he drew down his brows in a way not complimentary to Jack. "Where is your mother?" he asked, almost peremptorily.

"Mamma went to Great Falls last week," Mona told him, primly, just grazing him with one of her impersonal glances, which nearly drove him to distraction. "Aunt Mary has typhoid—there seems to be so much of that this spring—and they sent for mamma. She's such a splendid nurse, you know."

Phil did know, but he passed over the subject. "And you're alone?" he demanded.

"Certainly not; aren't you two here?" Mona could be very pert when she tried. "Jack and I are holding down the ranch just now—the boys are all on round-up, of course. Jack went to town to-day—to see a man."

"Um-m—yes, of course." It was Park, still trying to be polite and not commit himself on the subject. The man Jack went to see oftenest was the bartender in the Palace Saloon.

"The river's coming up pretty fast, Mona," he ventured. "Don't yuh think yuh ought t' pull out and go visitin'?"

"No, I don't." Mona's tone was very decided. "I wouldn't drop down on a neighbor without warning, just because the river happens to be coming up. It has 'come up' every June since we've been living here, and there have been

six of them. And at the worst it never came closer than the gate."

"Yuh never can tell what it might do," Park argued. "Yuh know yourself there's never been so much snow in the mountains. And this hot weather we've been having lately, and then the rain, 'll bring it a whoopin'. Can't yuh ride over t' the Joneses'? One of us'll go with yuh."

"No, I can't." Mona's chin went up. "I'm no coward, I hope, even if there was any danger—which there isn't."

Phil's chin went up, also, and he sat a bit straighter. Whether she meant it or not, he took her words as a covert stab at himself. Probably she did not mean it; at any rate, the blood flew consciously to her cheeks, after she had spoken, and she caught her under lip sharply between her teeth. And that did not make her temper more yielding.

"Anyway," she added, hurriedly, "Jack will be here; he's likely to come any minute, now."

"Oh, uh course; if Jack's got some new kind uh half hitch he can put on the river and hold it back, yuh'll be all right," fleered Park, with the freedom of an old friend. He had known Mona when she wore dresses to her shoe tops and her hair in long brown curls down her back.

She wrinkled her nose at him, also with the freedom of an old friend, and Phil stirred restlessly in his chair. He did not like even Park to be too familiar with Mona.

She lifted the big glass lamp down from its place on the clock shelf and lighted it with fingers not quite steady. "You men," she remarked, "think women ought to be wrapped in pink cotton and put under a glass case. If, by any miracle, the river *should* come up around the house, I flatter myself I should be able to cope with the situation. I'd just saddle my horse and ride out to high ground!"

"Would yuh?" Park grinned skeptically. "The road from here t' the hill is half under water, right now; the river's got over the bank above, and is floodin' down through the horse pasture. By the time the water got up here the river'd be as wide and deep one side uh yuh as the other. Then where'd yuh be at?"

"It won't get up here, though," Mona contended, coolly. "It never has."

"No; and the Lazy Eight never had t' work the Yellowstone range on spring round-up before, neither," Park told her, meaningly.

Whereupon Mona got upon her pedestal and smiled her unpleasant smile, against which Park had no argument ready.

They lingered till long after all good cow punchers are supposed to be in their beds—that is, unless they are standing night guard—but Jack failed to appear. The rain drummed upon the roof, and the river swished and gurgled against the crumbling banks, and grumbled audibly to itself because the hills stood immovably in their places and set bounds which it could not pass, however much it might rage against the sides.

When the clock struck a reedy, wheezy nine, Mona glanced at it significantly and smothered a yawn more than half affected. It was a hint which no man with an atom of self-respect could overlook. With mutual understanding, the two rose.

"I guess we better not keep yuh up any longer, Mona," Park said, with some ceremony. "I kept thinkin' maybe Jack would show up. 'Tain't right t' leave yuh here alone like this."

"I'm not the least bit afraid," Mona repeated. "You must call again some time." Her tone was impersonally friendly and had in it a note of dismissal.

So, there being nothing else that they could do, they said good-night and took themselves off.

"This is fierce," Park said, when they struck the lower ground. "Hang a man like Jack! He'll hang out there in town and bowl up on other men's money till plumb daylight. It's a wonder Mona wouldn't 'a' gone with her mother. But no, it'd be awful if Jack had t' git his own meals for a week. Say, the water's come up a lot, ain't it? If it rises

much more Mona'll sure have a chance t' 'cope with the situation,' all right. It'd just about serve her right, too."

Phil did not think so, but he was in too dispirited a mood to argue the point. It was not good for his peace of mind to sit and watch the color come and go in Mona's cheeks, and the laughter spring unheralded into her dear, big eyes, and the light tangle itself in the waves of her hair. Phil, having all his life been rather indifferent to women, loved the more intensely.

He guided his horse carefully through the deep places, and noted uneasily how much deeper it was than when they had crossed before. He cursed the convention which forbade his staying and watching over the girl back there in the house, which already stood upon an island, cut off from the safe, high land by a strip of back water that was widening and deepening every minute, and, when it rose high enough to flow on into the river below, would have a current that would make nasty crossing.

On the first rise he stopped and looked back at the light which shone out from among the dripping cottonwoods. Even then he was tempted to go back and brave her anger, that he might feel assured of her safety.

"Oh, come on," cried Park, impatiently. "We can't do any good setting here in the rain. I don't s'pose the water'll git clear up t' the house. It'll likely do things t' the sheds and corrals, though, and serve Jack right. Come on, Bud. Mona won't have us there, so the sooner we get under cover the better for us. She's got lots uh grit; I guess she can make out all right."

There was common sense in the argument, and Phil recognized it and rode on to camp. But instead of unsaddling, as he would naturally have done, he tied Sunfish to the bed wagon and threw his slicker over his back to protect him from the rain. And though Park said nothing, he followed Phil's example.

For a long time Phil lay with wide-open eyes staring up at nothing, listening to the rain and thinking. By and by the rain ceased, and he could tell by the dim whiteness of the tent roof that the clouds must have been swept away from before the moon, then just past the full.

He got up carefully, so as not to disturb the others, and crept over two or three sleeping forms on his way to the opening, untied the flap and went out. The whole hilltop was bathed in mellow radiance, and so was the valley. He studied critically the wide sweep of the river. He might almost have thought it the Missouri itself, it stretched so far from bank to bank; indeed, it seemed to know no banks but the hills themselves. He turned toward where the light had shone among the cottonwoods; there was a blot of shade that told him nothing.

A step sounded just behind. A hand —Park's hand—rested on his shoulder. "Look's pretty dubious, don't it, kid? Was yuh thinkin' about takin' a shoot down the hill t' investigate?" Park's words were not as warlike as they sounded. "Taking a shoot" means simply going by the shortest route.

"Yes," Phil answered, simply. "Are you coming?"

"Sure," Park murmured.

They got upon their horses and headed down the trail to the Stevens place. Phil would have put Sunfish to a run, but Park checked him. "Yuh want t' save his wind," he admonished. "If they's swimmin' t' be done, he'll need it."

They stopped on the edge of a raging torrent, and strained their eyes to see what lay on the other side. While they looked, a light twinkled out from among the treetops. Phil started and drew a sharp breath.

"She's upstairs," he said, and his voice sounded strained and unnatural. "It's just a loft where they store stuff; all the bedrooms are below." He started into the flood.

"Come on back here, yuh chump," cried Park, sharply. "Git off and loosen up your cinch b'fore yuh go, er yuh won't git far. Sunfish'll need room t' breathe, once he gits t' buckin' that current. He's a good water horse—just give him his head, and don't in-

terfere. And we got t' go up a ways b'fore we start in." He led the way upstream, skirting under the bluff. Trees were racing down, their roots reaching up in a tangle from the water, their branches waving like imploring arms. A black, tar-papered shack went scudding past, lodged upon a ridge, where the water was shallower, and sat there swaying drunkenly.

"That's old Dutch Henry's house," Park shouted, above the roar. "I'll bet he's cussing things blue on some pinnacle up there." He laughed at the picture his imagination conjured, and rode out into the swirl.

Phil kept close behind, mindful of Park's command to give Sunfish his head. Sunfish had carried him safely out of the stampede, and he had no fear of him now. His chief thought was a wish that he might do this thing quite alone. He was jealous of Park's leading. The next minute his heart stopped for fear of Park. A tree swept down before him, caught Park and his horse in its branches and hurried on, as if ashamed of what it had done.

Phil, in that instant, came near jerking Sunfish around to follow; but he checked the impulse as it was formed, and left the horse alone—which was wise. He could not have helped Park, and he could very easily have drowned himself and left Mona to her fate—whatever that might be.

They landed at the gate, Sunfish scrambled with his feet for secure footing, found it, and waded up to the front door. The water was a foot deep on the porch. Phil beat a tattoo upon the door with the butt of his quirt, and shouted. And Mona's voice, shorn of its customary assurance, answered faintly from the loft.

He shouted again, giving directions in a tone of authority, which must have sounded strange to Mona, but which she did not seem to resent, and obeyed without protest. She had to wade from the stairs to the door, and when Phil, stooping, lifted her up in front of him, she looked as if she were very glad to have him there.

"You didn't cope with the situation, after all," he observed, while she was settling herself firmly in the saddle.

"I went to sleep and didn't notice, till the water was coming in the door, and then——" she stopped abruptly.

"Then what?" he demanded, with quite malicious joy. "Were you afraid?"

"A—a little," she confessed.

Phil gloated in silence over it—until he remembered Park. After that he thought of little else. As before, so now Sunfish battled as seemed to him best. Phil, astride behind the saddle, held Mona somewhat tighter than he needed to have done, and let the horse go.

So long as Sunfish had footing, he braced himself against the mad rush of waters and forged ahead. Out where the current ran swimming deep he floundered desperately under his double burden. While his strength lasted he kept his head above water, struggling gamely against the flood that lapped over his back and bubbled in his nostrils. Phil felt his laboring and clutched Mona still tighter. Of a sudden the horse's head went under—the black water came up around Phil's throat with a hungry swish, and Sunfish went out from under him like an eel.

There was a confused roaring in his ears, a horrid sense of suffocation, for a moment. But Phil had learned to swim, after a fashion, when he was a boy at school, and he freed one hand from its grip on Mona and set to paddling, with much vigor and little skill; and though the undercurrent clutched him, and Mona's weight taxed his strength, he managed to keep them both afloat, and to make a little headway, until the deepest part lay behind them.

How thankful he was when his feet touched bottom no one but Phil himself ever knew. His ears hummed from the water in them, and the roar of the river was to him as the roar of the sea; his eyes smarted from the clammy touch of the dingy froth that went hurrying by in monster flakes; his lungs ached and his heart pounded heavily against his ribs when he stopped, gasping, beyond reach of the water devils that lapped viciously behind.

But all these things he speedily forgot when he felt Mona's chilled, frightened hands cling round his neck when need of it was passed.

"Are you all right?" he gasped, when he could get breath enough. There was a rock near at hand, and he drew her toward it; for, in truth, his knees trembled under him. They sat down and he looked more closely at her face, and discovered that it was wet with something more than river water. Mona the self-assured, Mona the strong-hearted, was crying. And instinctively he knew that not the chill alone made her shiver.

He slipped a wet arm tentatively around her waist, and she let it stay. After a minute, she did something which surprised Phil mightily — and pleased him more. She dropped her face down against the soaked lapels of his coat, and left it there. He laid a hand tenderly against her cheek, and wondered if he dared feel so happy.

"Little girl—oh, little girl," he said, softly, and stopped. For the crowding thoughts in his brain and his heart the English language has no words.

Mona lifted her face, and for a few seconds looked into his eyes. Her own were soft and shining in the moonlight, and she was smiling a little—the roguish little smile of the pastel portrait.

Phil smiled back.

Mona perked her head upon one side, and tried to keep back the tears that seemed determined to come. "You—you'll unpack your typewriter, won't you—and stay?"

Phil crushed her close. "Stay? The range land will never get rid of me now," he cried, jubilantly. "Hank offered to take me into the Lazy Eight, so now I'll put my money—you know I have some—into the business with him, and stay—always."

"You—dear!" Mona snuggled close and learned then how it feels to be kissed, if she had never known before. "And, Bud — you're the *bravest* man——"

Sunfish, having scrambled ashore a few yards further down, came up to them and stood waiting, as if to be forgiven for his failure to carry them safely, but Phil took no heed, after the first inattentive glance.

There was a sound of hurrying footsteps, and Park came up to them. "Well, say!" he remarked. "Ain't yuh got anything t' do but set here and—er—look at the moon? Break away and come up t' camp. I'll rout out the cook and make him boil us some coffee."

Phil whirled joyfully and faced him. "Park, old fellow, I was afraid——"

"Yuh needn't a-been; I got out uh the mix-up fine—but I guess my horse went on down—poor devil! I've been pokin' around, below there, lookin' for him; but I guess it's all off with him.

"Well, Mona, I see yuh was able t' cope with the situation all right—but the chances is yuh won't have no house by mornin'. I guess you'll own up now that the river *can* git through your gate!"

He laughed teasingly. And then, with Mona once more in the saddle, and with Phil leading Sunfish by the bridle, they trailed damply and happily up the long ridge to where the white tents of the round-up gleamed sharp against the skyline.

THE BIRD O' FREEDOM

By Captain George Wycherly-Kaye, U. S. A.

Being the account of a Fourth of July celebration in the Philippines. How the "rooky" from the city's slums got into disfavor with his comrades, and then proved that, after all, he was worthy of their respect

THE morning star shone faintly in the pink sky over the eastern hills; in the west, the dark shadow of the night, fringed with purple, still loomed over the towering volcanoes. The sergeant of the guard poked the sleeping trumpeter with the butt of his Krag.

"Rout out, 'Bird'—time for first call for reveille. Merry Fourth of July to you—come, get up."

The "Bird" yawned, stretched his cramped frame, cussed desultorily, but finally erected himself on his pipe-stem legs. "G'wan," he protested. "Fourt' in de Fillypeens! Cut it out!"

"Goin' to celebrate this Fourth like you did th' last one, when you was a little rooky boy?" asked Kearney, the company wit.

The weary, bedraggled guard cracked their wan faces into a grin.

The previous Fourth, the Bird, overpowered with a consuming desire to explore yonder hulks that once so proudly flaunted the red and gold of Spain on the glistening bay, thought much on boarding those stark, shell-riven wrecks, deep-bitten by Dewey's dogs of war on a famous day the year before. Saying naught, he had found a shaky dugout and clumsily paddled himself out to a stranded gunboat, and marveled greatly at all he saw thereon. Meanwhile, waves and wind had suddenly risen, as is their gentle custom in those isles. On his way back, a huge roller swamped his frail craft. To the sentry on No. 1 came a weird wail; far out on the waters the Bird was frantically clinging to his canoe and lamenting loudly. Robinson, in the prow of the rescuing *banca,* had yelled at him to put down his feet and walk—" 'twasn't over his head"—and so it was not—of which fact he had often, since, been reminded. Furthermore, being found without a "pass" by the officer of the day, and guilty of wandering from the fold without proper leave, he was cast into the outer darkness of the guard-house, where he gnashed his teeth for seven days, incidentally chopping several cords of tough wood for the company cooks.

Officers and muster rolls knew him as John Calmes; the company labeled him the "Bird," sometimes the "Cub." A cub he was—a wolf cub from the dark dens of a great city. Lean-chested, narrow of shoulder, suspicious of eye and yellow of fang, his thin lips curved back into a lupine snarl when he was cornered in any deviltry. An Ishmaelite of the streets was he, his hands against all men, theirs against him.

So, when he had joined them the year before, the Fifty-first had looked askance at him; the regiment was ninety-five per cent. American-born, and thought well of itself accordingly. Careless men were they, craving the smoke of battle, ready with jest or gibe—tall, clean-cut men who looked down on their English brothers in arms at Malta and Hongkong with love in their eye; fighting men, with world-conquering, virile faces, yet with their code of honor and decency. Thus it happened

the Bird's life was not one of those beside the still waters of a veteran's comparative ease. He always smoked the vilest of cigarettes; infallibly he would lie if pushed to the wall; and when he swore, his were foul, gutter oaths.

One morning, Kearney removed the pipe from his mouth and delivered an ultimatum. "Drop that line o' cussing, cub, or I'll warm you with my ramrod till you look as if you had been sleeping on a gridiron," he said, tersely. And the Bird forbore. He did not drink—the rare, white jewel in the toad's head, in his case.

"Say, lance corporal," he said to Graves one day, "dose mugs are allus kiddin' me about not boozin'. Say, onct when I wuz a kid, 'fore they pinched me and chucked me int' de 'formatory, I kind o' rem'ber some one putting dere mitts on me nut, 'n' tellin' me t' cut de booze. Kind o' queered me 'bout it, I t'ink. Funny, ain't it?"

Graves nodded, abstractedly. Silent and reserved, he was the Bird's idol. Strangely, as men in the army are, was the outcast attracted to the lance corporal, who was one of those unfortunate gentlemen that had drifted into Uncle Sam's service, like many others, through sorrow, or the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune, in varied guise.

"There is some good timber left in the lad still," Graves said, one day.

"Maybe," snorted "Ohio" Jones, peering into the breech-bolt of his rifle; "maybe. But it's overlaid with a lot of pitch, like the cedar pavements in my town at home." But Jones had been a pessimist ever since fate had driven him from a bookkeeper's stool into wearing the blue and khaki.

A year in the service, assisted by a touch of *dengue,* had, however, vastly improved the Bird. True, he cussed, this new Fourth morning; but to all soldiers it is given to cuss, freely and fully, at reveille and in the heat of battle. 'Tis the white man's safety valve.

This morning, the sun sprang over the eastern hills into a cloudless sky; the white mists, hanging low over marsh and river, fled before its burning rays. In front of the ancient, moss-covered church, where the garrison of two companies was quartered, the regimental band was playing "Yankee Doodle," as army bands always do at reveille on the Fourth. Inside of the gray walls the men were emerging from blanket and shelter tent. The sparrows flew twittering in and out through the great holes Dewey's shells had made in the church. In the inner court, a giddy cook's police was pounding with a bayonet on a sheet of iron roofing that a shell had knocked off, and was chanting derisively:

> Yankee Doodle came out here
> To swipe the gold and honey;
> The Filipinos ate the hon,
> The Spaniards got the money!
>
> Uncle Samuel bought a brick—
> Gold bricks are *so* handy!
> Bullets yet 'bout all *he* gets,
> Our Yankee Doodle dandy!

"Nuthin' to do to-day, I reckon," drawled a lanky rooky, as the men lounged under the trees after breakfast, looking at guard mounting. The band was playing "Columbia, the Gem of the Ocean." Behind it, in the trumpeters' row, behind the drums, the Bird was scowling at the regimental colors, pitched in honor of the day before the court gates. For it was the resplendent golden eagle on said colors, the national bird of freedom, that had given the Bird his sobriquet.

A gorgeous and wonderful eagle it certainly was, glittering with gilt paint, instead of silken embroidery, against the heavy blue silk. On its arrival, two years before, the color guard had viewed it with profound disgust; some greedy contractor had evidently machine-made its like by the hideous hundred. "Great Scott! it's more like a turkey buzzard, I'm thinkin'," complained the white-haired color sergeant to the junior major.

"No, looks to me more like a Bowery bird," the major said, staring at it, reflectively. "Probably a sea gull the contractor saw off the Battery."

The Bird, five days with the regiment, had gazed with awe at the tall standard,

at its rustling, drooping folds, the blue and white silk cords and tassels, gold lance head and the polished silver rings about the staff engraved with the names of the hundred battles the regiment had fought against British, Mexicans, Indians and the Spanish. The *rara avis* especially fascinated him.

"Say, sarge," he cried, "w'at does youse noime dat boid? Is dat de boid o' freedum?"

"Get out of here, you fresh rooky, or I'll break the staff over your head," snapped the enraged veteran; and the rooky fled. But "The Bird o' Freedom"—generally contracted to "Bird"—he was ever after. Hence he had since regarded the great war eagle with peculiar rancor, greatly to the joy of his company.

Guard mount was over. The sun had climbed higher in the sky, sending the thermometer into a fit of fever. The men sought the shade of the stone-paved outer yard, beneath the spreading trees. To-day was one of sport, of races, boxing and varied contests for prizes given by the officers. A heart-stirring game of baseball was also planned, between "K" and "L" companies. Great was the rivalry between the two companies. In battle, baseball, skirmish or march, even in the unhallowed joys of poker, jealousy greened their eye. Men dying in obscure, nameless battlefields, in jungle or plain, lifted their last whisper to ask the comrade that bent over them what company had carried the trenches of the enemy. Suchwise is the pride of the soldier.

The foot races, vaulting and jumping went on amain. Blue-shirted, felt-hatted, clad in khaki bleached by the salt Luzon marshes, the soldiers lay on the grass under a broiling sun. Behind them, the brown Filipinos looked on with dark eyes of wonder and amaze, at these giant Americanos who actually played to-day; uncertainly, they grinned at egg, barrel and potato races. The Americanos cheered, swore, smoked and gibed the unlucky; to the lucky the officer-judges awarded Mexican pesos and words of praise.

Upon the bamboo lookout that was lashed to the lofty dome of the church, the sentry—heedless of orders to watch the distant hills—craned his neck over his perilous foothold, to see the games below. Presently he bethought himself of his duty; his startled yell brought every soldier to his feet. "I thought it was too good to last," said Jones, moving off to get his rifle and belt. "Another hike after our little brown brothers."

Far away, on the distance-purpled Patalo hills, a glittering heliograph was flickering frantic flashes of light; the signal sergeant read it:

Heavy column *insurrectos* on hill road, near Miñan, moving toward Santo Tomas.

Before the assembly's last note sounded, the men were standing stiffly in the armed ranks, the first sergeants making pretense of calling the company rolls. "Gee," grumbled the Bird, from the line of file closers. "Do dey t'ink any guy'd miss a chanct for a scrap?"

"Column all ready?" asked the junior major. "All right? Forward!"

Over the winding, dusty road, between the tall, bamboo hedges, across old stone bridges that spanned deep, dark rivers, the flying column swept along with long, nervous stride. Arizona's cracked falsetto struck up with "K" company's pet song:

Oh, it's hike by day,
'N' stand guard by night,
Tryin' to head off Aggie's flight.

And his company joined in:

Into the fight, by day or night,
Th' resarves 'n' s'pports *may* be all right—
But it's "K" companee that wins the fight!

"Somewhat hot," mused the major, looking back at two new arrivals in the regiment that the sun had just knocked out.

"There they are—a cloud of smoke by day and a pillar of fire by night," quoth Graves, the lance, as they mounted the low dun hills. Four miles ahead, a huge black tower of smoke loomed athwart the blue sky; beneath it blazed the crackling nipa huts of a burn-

ing *barrio*. Behind the major trotted the Bird, bugle slung on his back, clucking to a rat of a Filipino pony. "I pinched 'im in de c'ral, sir," he chuckled, decorously, as the major's wandering gaze lighted on him with mild surprise. "T'ought youse might need 'n' ord'ly, sir, so I ducks wid de *caballo.*"

The dust went up in a choking cloud; the deadly tropic thirst gripped men's throats with a hand of burning brass. Ahead, the advance guard and flankers hurried along with their rifles at the "ready," panting, with sodden khaki clinging to their chests, peering cautiously into ravine and jungle. Pur-rut! pur-rut! — a sudden volley hurtled down on them from the brown hillside. Jets of dust danced up from the road. The lieutenant commanding the advance threw up his right hand, half turned, and fell heavily; from his faded blouse a crimson stream trickled listlessly across the road. Along the column men dropped with a clatter of arms, generally with a "cuss" word of annoyance, or else silent with disgust at their "luck." No enemy was to be seen —which was apt to rattle new men, but only made the Fifty-first swear under their breaths. They simply jammed their campaign hats on their heads more tightly, and composedly unslung their rifles.

" 'L' company to the right into line of skirmishers, in that field there, and open fire. Captain Walker, take your company back, go up the other side of the river, and flank their trenches," ordered the major, calmly. His big chestnut pawed the ground nervously as the Mauser bullets cut the tense air like white-hot swords plunged into brine. "L" company broke through the banana groves into the open fields. "Ha-a-lt," shouted its captain. With a sigh of relief, the long, panting line dropped behind a paddy dike in the yellow stubble. Prut! prut!—the ragged volleys drove down from the reddish hill trenches which they now could see. Overhead the Filipino messengers of death hissed above the lines.

"Hist! hist! hear them callin' you, Jones," laughed Kearney, filling the magazine of his Krag.

"At six hundred yards, at those trenches — company, load — aim — aim low, men—fire!" sang the captain's clear monotone. With a slash the volley cut the air; the red dust of the *insurrecto* trench spurted up against the green trees behind.

"The dust devils are a-dancin' ag'in t'-day," grinned Arizona. Putt! a bullet found its billet. "Hu-uh!" grunted Arizona. The rifle dropped from his hands; he fell forward on the dike. The men near by looked at his body with grim, silent sympathy, then set their teeth and joined in the roar of musketry. From the *barrio* came the distant wailing of the terrified women.

With a rising, cadenced rush, a heavy, jarring clangor, the Hotchkiss battery pounded up from the rear, horses a-froth with foam, the drivers swearing and urging them on with thong and spur. "Action, rear! Run the pieces up by hand into the clearing and open up on those trenches. How goes the ball, major?" asked the red-faced, battery captain, wiping his perspiring brow with his gauntlet.

"Rather tropical," answered the major, placidly. "Must be four or five hundred of them over there. Have sent Walker's company off to the right to flank them."

With a roar, gun No. 1 shook; the shell droned through the air and burst with a crash in a huge *îpel,* hurling the branches into the air.

"We're having our Fourth of July all right," said Johnson, behind the dike. "Bombs, fireworks, et cetery, manufactured right here, and the Krags spittin' out nigger chasers, all right, all right."

The fire redoubled along both reeking lines, the rattling hail of the bullets punctuated by the pounding of the Hotchkiss guns.

"Nice, quiet Fourth this is," snorted the first sergeant. "Here, you two rookies, stop shooting the tops of those palm trees off. If ye can't aim, then quit filling the atmosphere with lead. D' ye think you're rapid-fire guns?"

"At home they're makin' speeches

and eatin' ice cream, with pretty girls around thicker than coons in a hen house on a dark night," said Corporal Bullitt, in his soft Kentucky. He was lying on his back, patiently nursing an arm that a Mauser had drilled a blue-rimmed hole through.

Off to the right of the Filipino trenches suddenly burst a cheer from a dark grove, where sparkled the steel bayonets of the flanking company. An answering yell — but of fear — came from the *insurrectos.* From "K" company went up a tremendous whoop —back from "L" rolled a fiercer shout. "Sound the charge, trumpeter," cried the major, drawing sword and galloping down the line. The Bird's tongue clove for an instant to the roof of his mouth in his wild excitement; then loud and clear the stirring notes rang out over hill and plain. With a bound the men leaped to their feet; a cheer prolonged, menacing, rose above the stupendous clamor—the American battle cry! Who that has heard it can ever forget it, as it comes straight from the virile hearts of the bravest men that ever followed flag into fray? The long, curving line of steel dashed up the slopes of the hill in front. Comrades dropped unheeded, untended—the Filipinos wavered, fired one last volley, and fled into the jungle and undergrowth.

With a panting shout of triumph, the leading khaki groups sprang on the deserted trench; in it lay, huddled up, curious, red-trousered things that once were men. "'Infantry well intrenched cannot be taken by frontal attack'—so our text-books say," gasped a lieutenant, ironically, leaning against a tree and fanning himself with his campaign hat.

The brown men were buried in the trench they had defended, the wounded soldiers distributed among the battery caissons, and the march homeward taken up. The sun was dying on a gory battlefield of carmined clouds behind the Zambales when the column tramped into its post and broke ranks.

"All over, all over," shouted a rooky, tossing his Krag high in the air and catching it as it came down.

"Don't be too sure o' that, laddie. 'Don't be too sure o' that,' as the Black Douglas said," growled old Sergeant McPherson.

After supper, the men lounged and smoked in front of the church, talking over the day and its tally of fortune. Above them, the scintillant stars glistened through the palms. "A speech—a speech, Kearney! What's a Fourth without a speech?" called out one of the idling groups.

"'N' is 't a spache yez wants? Thin 'tis a spache yez shall hov," said Kearney, talking the brogue a generation in America had not washed from his tongue. To the top of a ruined tomb he climbed, and thence harangued the crowd:

"Leddies, gintl'min, also sojers! Phwat is Foorth o' Jooly widout a spache? 'Tis like ice crame widout th' crame, or a pretty bit o' calico about to improve 't"—and much more to the same effect.

On the monastery verandas above, the officers smoked in silence, their minds far away in the home land. Behind them, in the rear of the building, the adjutant's office, untenanted, slept in the brooding shadows. Noiselessly, four or five dim, white-clad shapes stole into the room, trying the safe, opening cabinet and desk. The Bird, tiptoeing by to get his bugle from the orderly room, halted, uncertain, in the doorway; a stealthy, dragging noise seemed to come from the gloom. From outside came the laughter of the men, the sound of Kearney's mock-impassioned eloquence: "Yis, dear Filipeenos, we may hov to kill some o' yez off, to civiloize yez, but civiloized yez must be. 'Tis th' orther, 'nd orthers must be obeyed." The Bird stared fixedly ahead into the further corners of the large room. What strange ghosts were those? His hair raised; but then he saw—saw a white figure seize the regimental colors. Was not the war eagle of the Americanos *anting-anting,* greatly to be desired?

"Gugus," shouted the Bird with a yell of astonishment, jerking out his revolver. "Drop dat flag, damn youse!"

His shots echoed deafeningly in the

church and monastery. A dozen men snatched up rifles; loading as they ran, they burst into the room. A fog of powder smoke thickened the air; through the opposite doors misty figures fled, disappeared. Down from the high balconies after them leaped the foremost soldiers; out through the broad courtyard followed the chase.

The soldier ahead stumbled over something in the great gap of the walls. "Sentry No. 2—boloed!" he stuttered, staggering to his feet. The quiet face of the dead sentinel smiled up peacefully at the stars; death's face had seemed beautiful to him that night.

In the adjutant's office, Graves held the Bird in his arms; from the slashed blouse of the trumpeter a dark red jet was throbbing and spurting into the silken folds of the great standard whose staff he still tightly grasped in one hand. Its golden lance head glittered in the smoky flare of the torches the wondering men held on high; their shadows, huge and grotesque, danced on the scarred and dented walls behind them.

"He must have fought the whole bunch," said the doctor, stooping over him. "Take him to the hospital. No, no, leave his hand alone," he added, sharply. "Take the flag with him, if necessary."

Down the long street of the *pueblo,* a long procession of *principales*—the leading men of the town—multicolored as to clothes, and puffing black cigars, wound its sinuous way to the colonel's quarters. At its head a native band played "A Hot Time in the Old Town To-night," in the spirit and intention of "The Voice that Over Eden Breathed." Behind the band, in whitest linen and glossy patent-leathers, stalked the *presidente* of the *pueblo,* cane in hand, his wrinkled face awry with calculated smile. Next came the native police, the white braid outlining their dark blue uniform; after them, several solemn striplings strode proudly along, upholding most wonderful transparencies:

VIVA! JoRG VeShINGtOn!
HooRaY IV JuLIO!

Under the colonel's window they halted; in beautiful Spanish the *presidente* glorified "Jorg Veshington," alleged that "Filipinos, too, loved and admired Jorg," and patted the Americanos mentally on the back. Solemnly he proclaimed their joy at the priceless boon of living beneath the Star-Spangled Banner, which he pleased himself to welcome. Above him the colonel listened gravely and courteously. The night wind stirred in the trees beyond the gaping natives.

In the hospital ward the Bird, trussed with red-tinged bandages, dreamily gazed with half-closed eyes at the tall colors that hung in quiet folds against the wall. "It's a good boid," he murmured, "no matter wot dey say."

"Don't y'u worry, kid; medico says you'll get well, all right," said the old color sergeant at his side, taking the pipe from his bearded mouth. "Y'u're all right, kid—kernel says so himself. Flag's baptized, now, and y'u b'long to it for keeps."

On the veranda the colonel's voice rose in the soft air, speaking of future peace, of things in the great, white land across the ocean, of the signs that presaged better things, but partly understood by the listening *principales;* he spoke of country and of home. Home! The hearts of the listening soldiers rose on the wings of thought and fled afar—far from these tropic isles where men's hearts beat and tug at the dull anchors of duty, like ships on the moaning bar, longing for the familiar waters—the havens of home—the ports of peace, where dwell their own strong kith and kin.

The Two-Handed Claymore

By Charles Carey

Author of "The Van Suyden Sapphires," Etc.

In this fascinating and highly original story Mr. Carey tells us of a strange quest which had for its object the recovery of an ancient weapon which, according to an old legend, possessed a mighty power; also of the dangerous enterprise on which a band of conspirators, who placed credence in this legend, embarked, thereby endangering the peace of more than one country.

"PENNSYLVANIA Road! Newark, Zanesville, Steubenville, Pittsburg, Wash'n'ton, Baltimore, Philadelphia and Nooo-oo York! All aboard!"

It was ten o'clock at night, and the big waiting room of the Union Station, at Columbus, Ohio, was almost deserted; only a few belated travelers were huddled about on the benches, in various stages of drowsy discomfort.

Now, at the stentorian summons of the caller, the majority of these hastily collected their hand baggage and, in straggling groups of twos and threes, made their way through the gates and down the steps to the waiting train.

Among them, however, was one young woman whose evident purpose was to pursue her journey alone. No one accompanied her as she tripped briskly down the platform, nor did she linger at the gate to exchange a last farewell with any attendant friends. Still, she seemed eminently capable of looking after herself, for her severely simple, though becoming, costume and the traveled appearance of the convenient leather bag which she carried proclaimed her an experienced wayfarer, a fact which the porter of the Pullman duly noted as he conducted her to her seat, and arranged her belongings about her berth.

She was not what one would ordinarily term a pretty girl, her features were, perhaps, too irregular to conform to the strict canons of beauty; but she had a wholesome, good-natured face, with a charming complexion, exquisite teeth, and a pair of laughing, hazel eyes, which, behind their mirth, showed shrewdness enough to appraise and estimate men and things at pretty nearly their exact value.

Just now, however, those eyes were narrowed into a distinct frown, and their owner's trimly shod foot was beating an angry little tattoo on the floor of the car; for be it understood that Miss Roberta Bruce, the possessor of the eyes and foot aforesaid, and widely known, moreover, as the invincible woman correspondent of the *New York Evening Clarion,* was retreating from the field of battle, shorn of her prestige, and compelled to admit that at last she had tasted defeat.

There had been held at Columbus, during that week, a big State fair, which included among the prize pumpkin exhibitions and fat cattle shows, as one of its features, an address each afternoon from some personage of national political prominence; and in the

course of one of these orations the Hon. William Wallace, Ohio's junior representative in the upper house of Congress, and chairman, moreover, of the Senate committee on foreign relations, had taken occasion to vigorously twist the lion's tail, by entering upon a bitter and entirely unexpected denunciation of England and English statesmanship.

Coming from such a source, and at a time when relations between the two countries were seemingly of the most friendly and harmonious character, the speech created a tremendous sensation, and the *Clarion* immediately dispatched Miss Bruce to Columbus to obtain an interview with Wallace, and to discover, if possible, the underlying motives which had prompted his attack.

Roberta had no difficulty in securing the interview. In fact, the senator was urbanity itself in the reception he accorded her; but when it came to a question of extracting information from him, that was an entirely different proposition. Apply the screws as deftly as she might, exercise all her trained perception and her boasted cunning, she could not worm from him the real cause of his suddenly acquired hostility toward Great Britain.

He talked freely to her on any other subject that came up, and she had grudgingly to confess that for the most part he talked charmingly and well; but on the one topic which she desired him to ventilate, he was absolutely noncommittal, parrying her shrewdest questions with a finesse so baffling that, despite her own chagrin, she was forced to applaud his readiness and skill.

Once, when she had almost run him aground, he cleverly turned the conversation to the one theme which no woman can refrain from discussing—jewels, and before she knew it they were well clear of the dangerous shoals toward which she had steered him.

"Pardon me," he said, with a smile, "but I have been admiring the ornament you wear at your throat"—directing her attention to a cairngorm brooch in an antiquated setting with which she fastened her collar—"and have been wondering if it is an old family heirloom?"

"Yes," she answered, unfastening it, and handing it over for his inspection. "It has been in the Bruce family for generations. Indeed, the tradition is that the brooch was originally a gift from King Robert himself to one of his sisters."

"Ah, then, you are one of the real Bruces; 'wi' a smack o' the heather aboot ye'?" he returned. "In that case you may be interested in some little trinkets I happen to have." And, stepping to his desk, he drew from one of the compartments a frayed and faded sash and a dingy bit of ribbon to which was attached a tiny St. Andrew's cross of silver, battered and dinted by usage and tarnished with age.

"This," he said, holding up the ribbon, with its pendant cross, "is the collar, and this the baldric or sash, which formed a part of the regalia of my heroic ancestor, old Sir William of glorious memory. Like your cairngorm, they have been handed down from generation to generation, always passing to the William Wallace who, in the judgment of the clan, will most worthily wear them.

"The legend in connection with them," he went on, half musingly, as he ran the faded scarlet silk through his fingers, "is that whenever a William Wallace appears on Scottish soil arrayed in this regalia and with Sir William's huge, two-handed claymore belted at his side, on that day the clansmen shall arise in their might, and Scotland shall once more be free!"

As he finished, there was a fire in his eye and a resonant strength to his voice entirely different from the somewhat dispassionate manner he had hitherto shown her, and in spite of herself, the girl thrilled at his tone and at his words. Highland blood has never been quite tamed, and it rouses to the word "Freedom!" as it does to the call of the pibroch. She forgot, for the moment, that she was the accredited correspondent of the *Evening Clarion*, sent out to interview a senator of the United States. His utterance awoke a dormant racial principle within her, bridging the centuries, and making it seem the most nat-

ural thing in the world to do or dare anything for the honor of "Auld Reekie."

"And why not you?" she cried, her eyes shining, her lips parted in her enthusiasm. "Why can you not be the William Wallace who shall bring it to pass?"

He laughed shortly, and, turning to his desk, laid the historic relics in their place. "Look behind you, Miss Bruce," he said, pointing to the inner office, where two or three typewriters were clicking busily away, a clerk was impatiently endeavoring to obtain No. 2620 at the telephone, and a blue-uniformed messenger boy awaited instructions.

"There you will find your answer," he said. "This is the prosaic twentieth century, remember; and I do not flatter myself that my name and my little trinkets would cut much figure in the Scotland of to-day. Imagine the reception I should get from those hard-headed old merchants at Glasgow and Edinburgh, if I should come dancing along in bonnet and kilt to lay such a proposition before them. Besides, you forget; the legend says that, in addition to the regalia, one must also have the two-handed claymore."

"That is preserved at Stirling Castle, is it not?"

He shook his head. "No; the sword at Stirling Castle described in all the guide books as belonging to my ancestor was never his at all, but was the weapon of one of his followers. This is absolutely proven by our family records."

"Where, then, is the genuine claymore?" she questioned, interestedly.

"Ah! that is another question. We know that it was confiscated at the time of Sir William's capture and execution; but into whose hands it fell we have never been able to discover. Some years ago one of the members of the family endeavored to trace it up and recover it, merely for sentimental reasons, of course; but, beyond demonstrating that the old relic was unquestionably still in existence, the effort resulted in nothing. I am sorry, for its possession would naturally have in time reverted to me, and I know of nothing on earth it would give me more pleasure to own."

"If you had it, I wonder if you would not dare?" The girl smiled; yet her question seemed a bit too eager to be altogether banter.

"Can you doubt it?" he rejoined, with exaggerated gallantry. "Especially if the daughter of the Bruces were to pin me on a sword knot for a further talisman."

He gave a reminiscent pause. "Twenty years ago, Miss Bruce," he added, with half a sigh, "I might have given you that answer in sober, serious earnest. I was just about inconsequent enough then to believe such a project capable of realization. I suppose, though, all of us who have borne the name have entertained the same dream at some period of our youth. Why should we not. The love of Scotland has been instilled into us with our mother's milk, bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh. Indeed, one of my earliest recollections is that of learning my prayers at my grandmother's knee, and having her always insist that the final petition should be: 'And, O Lord, please make Scotland free!'"

"But you are still young. You are not too old to dream," the girl cried, impulsively.

The senator smiled. "Too old for such a dream as that, I am afraid, Miss Bruce," he said. He seemed to hesitate a moment, as though about to say something more; then, as if suddenly recalled to himself, quickly arose and extended his hand. "And now," he added, "I fear I must really ask you to excuse me. I have an appointment——"

"Senator," she broke in, desperately, remembering her duty now that she saw the chance for an interview about to escape her, "won't you tell me the real reason for your attack upon England?"

He looked at her quizzically. "How could a William Wallace ever be anything but inimical to 'perfidious Albion'?" he asked, with a laugh. Then, seeing the shadow of disappointment which came into her eyes, he continued, more kindly: "Let me off, please, this

time, Miss Bruce. Perhaps some day before long I shall have something to tell you which will be really worth while; and, if that time does come, I promise that I will give the story to you, and to you alone."

So with that Roberta Bruce had to be content.

II.

The minutes passed while the train, which was to bear Roberta back to the East, stood in the station. The locomotive panted and puffed at the head of the long string of cars, as though gathering strength for a fresh stage of the journey.

Through the open window of her car her eyes unconsciously noted the scene—that chiaroscuro effect of a big train shed at night, with the arc lamps each a distinct point of radiance amid the drifting clouds of smoke and steam, the wide, deserted platforms, the dingy inspectors with flaring torches and clanking hammers passing from wheel to wheel, the slow trundling of an empty truck back to the baggage room.

The time was up at last. The trim, blue-uniformed conductor snapped to the cover of his watch, uttered a crisp "All aboard!" waved his hand to the watching engineer, and, with scarcely a tremor to mark its starting, the train began to glide out from the station.

Just then Roberta, happening to glance backward, saw a tall, athletic man in a gray suit and carrying a suit case in his hand, break through the gate, and, with one quick, startled look toward the receding train, set out to overtake it. Lowering his head and throwing back his shoulders, he tore down the steps, and, with charging stride, came racing along the platform.

In a flutter of sudden excitement, the girl leaned far out of the window to watch the unequal race. The train was gathering momentum with every revolution of the wheels; but the man never faltered. Faster and faster he sped, and Roberta was fain to cheer as she saw that he was gaining Only a few steps further, now. Would he make it? Her gloved hands were tightly clasped, her breath was coming in sympathetic little gasps as she hung out viewing the struggle.

On, on, he came, and just as the rear car cleared the arch of the shed, he gave a superb forward leap, caught the elusive rail by one hand, and, with a mighty swing, landed himself and his paraphernalia in safety on the platform.

With a shrill screech from the engine, the train thundered out into the night; and its late pursuer, breathing a little faster, perhaps, but otherwise unruffled by his exertions, opened the door and sauntered slowly up the aisle of the car.

Roberta gave a quick indrawing of her breath as she recognized that it was none other than Senator Wallace.

Nor did he seem displeased at the unexpected meeting. His face lighted up with one of its rare smiles, and he extended his hand in cordial greeting as he came up to the section where she was, which, by the way, was the only one not yet made up for the night.

"Well met, Miss Bruce," he said, seating himself beside her. "I have been bemoaning my luck in that I was forced to take this lonely night ride, having no idea that fate had such kindness in store as to make you my fellow traveler. Misery loves company, you know."

"Yet you were almost successful in escaping the experience, were you not?" said she, archly. "I had the pleasure of witnessing that exciting sprint of yours down the platform, and I do not think it can be asserted that you 'romped in,' as they say at the race tracks."

"No," he answered. "I will not deny that it was rather a close shave. You see, my decision to go by this train was not reached until a scant half hour ago, and a delay or two by the way made me later than I expected in reaching the station.

"Yet," he added, musingly, "it is always by a hair that I win, anyway. When I was elected senator, it was only by a margin of one sorry vote. In fact, the largest majority I ever rolled up

in all my office seeking was but twenty-nine."

"Still, you have always won," she responded, admiringly. "What difference by how much, so long as one can score a victory? Besides, all your battles have been against overwhelming odds, have they not?"

"Well," he replied, "I think I can at least be free from the reproach of being termed a featherbed soldier in politics. There has been very little of inglorious ease in my campaigns. The other fellows have always been able to make it lively enough to suit even the most strenuous appetite.

"Yet I like to fight," he continued, his eye kindling as memory recalled some of those bygone contests. "And it may be set down as an aphorism, that the more difficulties in the way, the greater the obstacles to be overcome, the better is sure to be the fighting. There is no doubt of the berserker blood in my veins. I love a shindig for the very sake of the shindig as much as any Irishman who ever celebrated St. Patrick's Day. Ah, Miss Bruce, reverting to the topic of our conversation of this afternoon, you don't know how often I have envied those old ancestors of ours. They never lacked the opportunity for a scrap.

"And just think how gloriously they took advantage of their chances. They had all of England's 'panoply and pride' arrayed against them, yet their stout hearts never quailed. With their devoted little bands of Highlanders, they forced victory time and time again from the very jaws of defeat. Naught save treachery from their own side was ever able to encompass their overthrow."

While the senator sat thus dilating upon what was evidently a favorite topic with him, the girl listened, enthralled and enchanted by the flowing measure of his speech.

They were speeding through the open country now, and the air came in long, refreshing gusts through the window, bearing to their nostrils the perfume of the growing corn and the resinous scent from hillside and woodland.

Roberta felt a strange exaltation of spirit arising within her at his words; for he possessed in a marked degree the subtle gift of magnetism, and a long apprenticeship at public speaking had given him the involuntary trick of presenting any subject on which he spoke in its most fascinating light. His voice was rich, mellow, musical, and his manner impressive and confidential. Nor, moreover, could the trend of his remarks well fail to prove inspiring to one with whom the bellicose temper of the Bruces was a tradition and a birthright.

As she listened, it seemed to her that that curious reversion was again taking place within her which she had experienced in the afternoon. Once more the years were cast aside, and she lived anew the days when rude and bloody warfare was the only work of men, the women's task to bind their wounds and nerve them to the fray.

Her cheeks flushed, her eye brightened, she fairly hung upon his utterance—and then the train slackened speed, the air brakes hissed, there was a banging of doors, the hoarse bawling of a station's name, and the dream was shattered. She was back again in the twentieth century, with the definite task before her of extracting from the man at her side the secret he so jealously guarded.

They had arrived at their first stop, a junction some twenty miles out of Columbus. The porter came down the car, bearing in his hand a yellow envelope.

"'Scuse me, senatah," he said, stopping at their section; "but yere's a tellygraft jes' done come fo' yo'."

"Ah, this is what I have been expecting," commented Wallace. "Pardon me a moment, Miss Bruce," as he tore it open and glanced at the contents.

The town where they had halted was the point where the dining car which had accompanied the train from Cincinnati was to be dropped, and, as a consequence, some rapid switching was now being done.

As the senator opened up his slip of yellow paper, with its typewritten message, there came a sudden jolt to their

car, and with the lurch Miss Bruce was thrown over against his shoulder.

Involuntarily, in that brief second of time, her eye caught the wording of the telegram and mastered its substance. It read:

Message received. Will meet you at Pittsburg, as you suggest, and accompany you to New York. Have information which leads me to believe the recovery of the claymore now certain. JAMES DOUGLAS.

Although her action was entirely unpremeditated and without design, Roberta, as she regained her equilibrium, blushed furiously with the consciousness that she had, so to speak, been playing the eavesdropper, and also, perhaps, from a fear that the senator might suspect such to have been the purpose of her catapult-like movement. Fortunately, however, he attributed her confusion to another cause.

"This is really abominable," he broke out, angrily, endeavoring to put her at her ease by reviling the railroad. "The idea of a line which claims to furnish first-class service jerking us about as though we were in cattle cars!"

When they were once more en route, he resumed their interrupted conversation where it had broken off; but the spell was gone. Both of their minds were occupied with the information which had come in the message, and it was not long until Wallace excused himself and retired to the smoker, while Roberta betook herself to her berth.

She had had a trying and exhausting day, and ordinarily would have fallen asleep as soon as her head touched the pillow; but to-night nothing was further from her thoughts than slumber.

The final clause of the telegram she had read had set her all a-tingle with excitement, for it had answered the query which the *Clarion* had sent her West to propound; it had furnished her a clew to Senator Wallace's real motive in his attack upon Great Britain. Now her keen newspaper intelligence was at work, reviewing and comparing facts, data and impressions in the light of a wider comprehension.

"It seems unquestionable that I am right," she declared to herself. "There can be no other solution; no other possible hypothesis.

"Oh, what a dolt I have been!" she cried, with a writhing sense of angry shame. "And what an idiot I must have appeared to him!"

Verily, her pride was humbled to the dust. She who had boasted that there was no sphinx, however silent, which she could not force to speak, no tactician so wary as to evade her net, no journalistic riddle too difficult for her to unravel, had been beguiled and mystified as though she were the merest tyro in the profession.

Why, it was all as plain to her now as the nose upon her face. In order to conceal his plans, Wallace had simply resorted to the old diplomatic ruse of telling the truth.

With ready adroitness, he had caught her interest by playing upon her Scottish predilections. Then, when he had blinded her eyes with her own kerchief, he had boldly thrown his hand face up upon the table, and had bade her look.

"Oh, idiot, numskull, fool, that I was!" she groaned. "How he must have gloated to himself over my stupidity and his own cunning!"

Yes, she decided, his actions, his words, the whole sequence of events, could hold but the one meaning. That was beyond peradventure to her, now that she had obtained the key to them in her hasty glimpse at the telltale telegram.

Have information which leads me to believe the recovery of the claymore now certain.

"The recovery of the claymore!" The phrase could have but one reference. Chimerical, rash, insane even, as the project might appear, Wallace was evidently preparing to test the efficacy of the old legend, and cast himself forward as the leader of the Scots.

His attack upon England, then, in his much discussed Columbus speech, was simply the first gun in his campaign for empire.

Again her thoughts reverted to the telegram. It had been sent from Pittsburg, and was signed by James Douglas.

"Douglas? Douglas?" she puzzled, and then in a quick flash of comprehension: "Why, that must be none other than the famous millionaire—the Pittsburg steel king!"

She ran over in her mind all the stories she had heard of this man—many of them pure fiction, a few of them fact; but all illustrative of his character and genius—and speedily concluded that her surmise was not amiss.

He was a plunger, it was said, caring little for any venture where the hazard was not desperate enough to make the returns enormous; yet so unvarying had been his luck, that in a career of less than ten years he had risen to the position of one of the millionaire magnates of the country.

Conservative financiers frowned on his methods, and prophesied all manner of evil as his ultimate end; but, nevertheless, he was for the present a factor in the great game of modern commerce which none of them could afford to disregard.

He was of good old Scotch stock, proudly asserting his descent from that "Black Douglas" with whose fearsome name lowland mothers were wont to hush the crying of their infants.

Of such blood and of such a nature, it would have been strange, indeed, had Wallace's reckless project failed to enlist his sympathy; he was, in short, the one wealthy man in the country who might have been counted on as a certain adherent, and Roberta was not slow to recognize that his association with the enterprise was a tower of strength toward its actual accomplishment.

Without Douglas, it was a hopeless, impracticable dream; but with the man who had invaded commercial England, and against the fiercest opposition had effected there some of the greatest trade combinations of recent times, it did not seem so altogether impossible of consummation.

His money, his prestige—above all, his genius for securing the coöperation of other men in his schemes—lent it a solidity and an importance which as the vision of even so eminent a personage as Wallace it utterly lacked; in other words, took it from the field of romance into the circle of everyday, matter-of-fact deals.

"So then," Roberta reflected, with elation, "I have not failed, after all. On the other hand, I have succeeded in capturing a really magnificent story."

As she lay there in the darkness of her berth, the flaring headlined page on which the matter would be set forth in the *Clarion* seemed to dance before her eyes; the rattling car wheels beneath her caught up the burden of her thoughts and sang: "Victory! Victory! Victory!"

She pictured to herself the look of wondering admiration which would overspread the countenance of old Deacon, the editor, when she laid the pages of her story before him. Why, it would discount any news "beat" which had been compassed in New York in years!

And then suddenly that uncanny other self, that hereditary consciousness which had come to her under the spell of Wallace's eloquence that afternoon, stood forth and confronted her.

What effect, it demanded of her, would this proposed *exposé* have upon the prospects and the success of William Wallace?

That he was working in the silence, not yet ready to have his plans known, was shown by the manner in which he had eluded all interviewers, and especially by the elaborate pains he had taken to hoodwink her.

Well, her newspaper self responded, did she not owe him one for that? Here was her chance to pay him back.

Ah, but did she count the cost? returned the spirit of the Bruces. Forewarned, with England, inevitably meant forearmed. Publicity at the present time spelled nothing less than failure.

So the two warring elements within her wrangled and argued until, finally, completely worn out by the contention in her brain, she sank into a troubled slumber.

III.

It was an hour or two after breakfast, and Roberta sat in the sleeper with a magazine in her lap, while the train ran smoothly along through the placid Pennsylvania landscape; past the fertile fields of the thrifty Dutch farmers, their small, squat houses dwarfed into insignificance by the towering proportions of their mammoth red barns; winding among the rolling green hills; rumbling over tranquil water courses.

She had slept rather late, almost all the other passengers in the car having arisen by the time she climbed out of her berth.

Now, the night bringeth counsel, it is said; but it must be confessed that Roberta was no nearer a decision in the morning upon the question of casuistry, which had raised itself to vex her, than she had been when she fell asleep.

The two impulses which beset her, pulling her inclination in opposite directions, seemed equally strong, and she could not for the life of her determine which it were best to follow.

On one side, ambition beckoned her, showing the practical results of an accomplished triumph in her chosen career; but, on the other, that potent influence of her blood, shadowy though it might be, drew her with an attraction no less strong, pointing the way to glory and renown—not for herself, 'tis true; but for a land consecrated to her by all the noble and inspiring traditions of her race.

In the dressing room the reflection came to her with some measure of relief that, inasmuch as she was not due to arrive in New York until that evening, there was really no necessity for her to make an immediate choice. She had the whole, long day before her in which to consider, and it would be time enough for her to reach a conclusion when she had to. In the meanwhile, she would leave the matter in abeyance, trusting to fate for a sign to direct her footsteps aright.

This resolution attained, she smoothed the wrinkles from her brow, and made her way forward to the dining car, a very healthy appetite for breakfast having begun to assert its claims upon her attention.

The direction of her affairs having thus been left to fate, that convenient goddess seized the helm in no haphazard way; for, when Roberta was ushered into the car by the urbane steward, she found only one seat vacant, and that was at a table already occupied by Wallace and a dark, heavy-featured man, whom she rightly guessed to be James Douglas.

"Ah, Miss Bruce," cried the senator, greeting her with a gay good-morning, and seizing the opportunity to present his companion. "As always, you appear in the nick of time. You have saved two dour Scotchmen from the tedium of eating their 'parritch' alone, and by the same token have made our trio complete. Eh, Jim? A Douglas, a Wallace and a Bruce together at meat! What more could be asked?"

"You herd 'em wrong, senator," put in the other man, with an attempt at clumsy gallantry. "Ladies first! Besides, in a bunch of Scotch, the Bruce should always be the bellwether."

"Ah, but I called the list in scriptural fashion," lightly retorted the senator. "The last shall be first, and the first last, you know."

"So you'd make it a Bruce, a Wallace and a Douglas, would you?" with an air of mock injury. "Listen to the conceit of the man, Miss Bruce. I don't mind giving the lead to royalty; but I'd like to see any cattle-stealing Ellerslie that ever lived push a Douglas out of second place."

Thus they chaffed back and forth, until finally, on the senator's motion, they agreed to leave the question of precedence to Roberta.

"My loyal kinsmen," she began, carrying on the spirit of banter, "ye do me hurt in that ye ask your sovereign to determine so weighty a matter. For, if I yield the palm to one, I must perforce wound the other, and that I would hesitate to do."

She paused a moment, and then with a touch of heightened color to her cheek, and a thrill of earnestness to her

voice, went on: "But why agitate such a question as this? Scotland holds neither name first and neither last; but both are equally glorious, synonyms each for valor and truth and patriotism!"

"Bravo!" cried the senator. "You are right, Miss Bruce. There is no need for any of us to quarrel about our ancestry. As Schley said at Santiago: 'There is glory enough for all!'"

Douglas lifted his glass of water from the table, and raised it to his lips. "I drink to our ancestors," he said.

"And I to their present representatives," added Wallace, with a bow across the table to Roberta.

"And I," cried the girl, with a sudden impulse of daring—"I to free Scotland, and the recovery of the claymore!"

Had she exploded a bombshell in the midst of the party, the effect could scarcely have been more startling to her two companions.

Douglas gasped, and his dark face grew almost purplish in its hue, while he set down the glass he held to his lips with a bang upon the table.

Wallace, more self-contained, did not so far lose his equanimity; but he, too, showed evident concern. Then an expression of quick relief dawned in his eyes.

"Oh, I see," he ejaculated, with an uneasy laugh. "You refer to the old family legend I told you yesterday. Well, I drink your toast with all my heart, Miss Bruce; but I am afraid that all the good wishes on earth will not be able to restore the claymore to its rightful owners."

Douglas, too, gave a snort of comprehension. "So he has been showing you his ancestral treasures, has he, Miss Bruce? Well"—with a badly assumed carelessness—"that is a very pretty story about the claymore; but I suppose all our old Scottish families have such traditions. I know my mother used to be able to string them out by the yard."

The conversation drifted then to other topics; but it was noticeably stiff and constrained, and neither man seemed dissatisfied when Roberta, having finished her breakfast, arose and announced her intention of returning to the other car.

The day was a beautiful one in midsummer, the morning fresh and bright, the sky clear as a bell, save where a few fleecy baby clouds flecked the wide expanse of blue.

Roberta opened her magazine to read; but her eye quickly strayed away from the printed page to the shifting panorama of green and gold which rolled back from before her window, and soon she was lost in a dreamy reverie, her thoughts naturally reverting to the two men she had just left, and whose destiny, as she believed, lay at the end of her pencil point.

Wallace was the harder of the two to catalogue, she decided. His colorless, ascetic countenance, with its broad, smooth brow, high cheek bones, prominent nose, hair prematurely gray at the temples, and steady eyes, was like a mask, concealing behind its unruffled exterior the man's daring ambitions and passionate prejudices. It was the face of a student, a dictator, a diplomatist, a professional gambler.

Such a man can never be content with second position. His intuitions are so keen, his reading of the future so vivid, that he can brook no interference in the plans he lays to accomplish his ends. For the same reason, he will chance hazards which seem simple desperation to a less prophetic soul.

Yet, for all that, he can play a wary game, content to bide his time, reconcile conflicting forces, and wait for the hour to strike when success is absolutely assured.

"And such are the men who command the ages," she asserted to herself; "not the Hotspurs and Ruperts who spoil all by their over-precipitancy."

Douglas was of quite another type. Stout and stockily built, powerful as a bull—bull-like, indeed, in all his elements—he was unquestionably the man of action. His crisp, curling black hair, his flashing blue eye, his bluff address, all pointed to the strenuous temperament.

Win or lose, it would matter little to

Douglas. His was a nature which found its joy in the sheer struggle of combat. True, he might at times fight as warily and as well as Wallace; but more often would he spend his strength in mad, unavailing rushes, and, the battle over, his interest would quickly wane. He had nothing of the constructive genius. A great war general, perhaps; a great ruler in time of peace, never!

Her thoughts turned again to the senator. "Yes, he will be a wonderful leader," she declared. "One may well do worse than follow his star."

So it was that the glamour of romance and the fighting instinct derived from her forebears finally carried the day. The arguments of the newspaper woman fell to the ground, and once more, although he knew it not, William Wallace had won. But, as ever, it was by a hair.

She drew paper and pencil from the little bag which hung at her side and hastily wrote a couple of lines across the sheet. Then, holding it folded in her hand, she stepped up the aisle to where Wallace and his friend sat, their heads bent together in close consultation.

"Gentlemen," she said, and for the life of her she could not prevent her voice from trembling a little; you see, it was a crisis in her life—"gentlemen, I think it only fair to tell you that I am fully informed as to your project—not perhaps in all its details, but sufficiently to understand the goal at which you aim——"

Douglas interrupted her with a hasty exclamation, and leaned forward, as if to ask a question; but Wallace laid a hand on his arm to enjoin silence.

As for the latter, his self-control was perfect. Not a muscle in his face quivered, his smile was as bland as though she had merely passed some ordinary comment on the weather.

"Yes," he said, evenly. "And what then?"

There was no question of her statement in his tone. In fact, both men, astute readers of their kind that they were, had immediately recognized that this was no bluff to surprise an avowal; but that the girl was in possession of a definite and positive knowledge.

"What, then?" repeated the senator. "Does it all come out in this evening's *Clarion?*"

"Damned if I will stand for blackmail, Wallace," broke in Douglas, hotly. "I'll——" but again he succumbed to the restraining pressure on his arm.

The girl, with a scornful little smile upon her lips, unfolded her paper, and silently held it out to the two men. It was the draft of a telegram, tendering her resignation from the staff of the paper.

Even the senator's studied composure flickered before this proof of her disinterestedness.

"But I don't understand," he stammered. "Why should you——"

"I want to help you in the recovery of the claymore," she cried, eagerly; "and after that——"

The senator glanced quickly about the car, and placed his finger to his lips.

"After that," finished Roberta, in a lower tone, "I want to aid you in your larger scheme."

"But what I can't see," interjected Douglas, suspiciously, "is why you can't help us, and hold your job, too?"

"I was sent out, Mr. Douglas," she responded, with simple dignity, "to discover the underlying motive for Senator Wallace's Columbus speech. I have done so. Loyalty to my employers, common honesty, indeed, demands that if I am to remain with them I should report to them whatever I have learned. There is but one way to evade that duty, and I have chosen it."

Wallace gave her a glance of admiring respect. "I begin to think, Jim," he muttered to his companion, "that we have gained a more valuable ally than we suspected. Won't you sit down, Miss Bruce?" in his most cordial tone. "If you are to cast your lot with ours, it were perhaps better that we have an understanding at the start.

"Now, do you mind telling us where and how you gained the information you possess? I thought our secret was absolutely safeguarded."

It was Roberta's turn now to display embarrassment. She felt a natural reluctance from imparting to him the intelligence that she had read a telegram over his shoulder.

"Is that really necessary?" she asked. "I can assure you that the person who told me will in the future be as silent as yourself."

Wallace looked far from satisfied; but he noted her disinclination to speak, and failed to press his question further.

It was Douglas who relieved the slight frigidity of the situation. "Oh, I don't care anything about post-mortems," he declared, with his usual impetuosity; "what's done is done. It's the future I am thinking about. How are we going to use Miss Bruce, senator? What shall we set her to do?"

"I am a woman," she broke in upon them, "and, remember, in some situations a woman can accomplish more than a man. Besides, I have had wide experience as a newspaper correspondent. Let me go to England; let me see if I cannot recover the claymore for you."

"Come, now," ruminated Douglas, "that is not a bad idea. With your shrewdness and ability, you might very easily be a big help to us over there. You've heard of Sir John Monteith, haven't you?"

"You mean the British premier?"

"Yes." He paused a moment, as though to consider. "It is very essential," he finally said, significantly, "that we should be advised as to just how much he knows, and also as to his intentions."

Roberta nodded her head. "I think I understand. How soon do you want me to start?" she said, as unconcernedly as though accepting an invitation to dinner. "And in what capacity had I better make my appearance?"

"I have been thinking of that," rejoined Douglas. "Say, senator"—turning to his companion—"my wife sails for London next Wednesday. Why wouldn't it be a good plan for Miss Bruce to go along with her as an American heiress, or something of that sort?"

"An excellent idea," assented Wallace. "It would give her the *entrée* to the very people we wish her to meet, and which she could obtain in no other way. You have no objection to assuming the character, have you, Miss Bruce?"

"I can at least try it. In short, I am willing to do anything, if I can only accomplish results."

"Oh, I'll bet you take the part to the queen's taste," hastily interposed Douglas. "And I'll tell you right now that the old lady will give you the swell, bang-up time of your life. She's in with all the push over there, and she knows how to do it. But look here," he added, solemnly, "don't you go to getting mixed up with any of those dukes or barons of theirs. They'll all be wanting to marry you, if they think you've got money, and you're entirely too nice a girl to waste yourself on trash like them."

IV.

While Roberta Bruce, duly dispatched upon her mission under the protecting wing of matronly, kind-hearted Mrs. Douglas, was crossing to Southampton amid all the luxurious environment afforded by a big ocean liner, a series of events was transpiring in a far distant quarter of the globe which, all unsuspected by her, were destined to exert a marked influence upon the enterprise she had in hand.

Along the irregular line of the South American coast there is a wide, curving bay, across whose shallow bed the long rollers of the South Atlantic come thundering in, beating a majestic diapason against the sandy shore, and tossing their spray even to the outposts of that matted, tropical jungle which surrounds the narrow semicircle or beach.

It is a beautiful, yet a solitary, spot. At night, the full, bright moon casts its gleam in pathways of molten silver across the rippling waves; by day, the waters flash and dimple in the glory of unclouded sunshine. But by man it is deserted. Far out the steamers pass by in their quest to north and south; but no sail save that of the very tiniest craft

dare venture across those dangerous shoals. Year by year, the jungle stretches a more impenetrable barrier along the shore.

The country is Aureata, one of the Latin republics, and this bay of Sancta Espiritu is situated on its northeastern border. A hundred miles or so further down the coast is an excellent roadstead and the capital city of San Juan, and a few leagues inland rises the serrated mountain chain where Anglo-Saxon energy has forced Spanish indolence to action, and with puffing donkey engines, ponderous stampers, swaying derricks, all the rude, inartistic paraphernalia of mining, is dragging hidden treasures of yellow metal from the stubborn rock. But here at Sancta Espiritu one sees only the peaceful languor of nature undisturbed.

Yet it was to this lonely inlet one morning early in September that a boat, manned by eight sturdy seamen, put off from a passing steamer and headed for the shore.

In the stern, wrapped in the folds of a gray military cloak with a touch of red at collar and revers, was seated a tall, rawboned figure, a man with a hard, homely face, his complexion speckled like a turkey's egg, light blue eyes and bristling red hair. Beneath the brim of his black slouch hat, drawn low over his brow, there showed a vivid scar extending diagonally from his temple to the center of his forehead, an evident reminder of some savage saber stroke.

He sat silent and meditative, so deeply engrossed with his own thoughts that it was with a little start of surprise he noted the grounding of the boat upon the beach.

Himself and his luggage, a single small camp chest, having been disembarked, he waved his hand in farewell to the sailors, and stood watching them while they rowed back to the waiting vessel. The boat was hoisted aboard, the ship turned her prow again to the south; yet still he stood there, gazing with moody eyes, until the two long, trailing ribbons of smoke from the steamer's funnels had become only a blur of indistinct haze against the horizon.

A half sigh broke from his lips, the shadow deepened for a moment in his eyes; then his face hardened, and with a quick, nervous movement, as though casting irresolution and regret behind him, he turned from the shore.

His quick ear caught a slight rustling in the chaparral, as though some wild creature of the jungle were making a stealthy progress through it, and a second later a score of swarthy little men, with rifles at their shoulders and naked machetes buckled at their sides, sprang out upon the sand and surrounded him with glad acclamation.

A tatterdemalion crew, indeed! Most of them were barefoot, all ragged, dirty and unshaven, their frayed garments torn by briers and caked with mud. Andrew McNeilis swept his eye over them with a glance of supreme disgust.

"Captain Alvarez," he said, harshly, speaking in a broad Scotch brogue, "I weel ken that it's been no pleasurin' wherewith ye hae been engaged; still, I doot not there was water whiles at hand, and mayhap a razor amang ye. Ye might at least keep clean."

The man addressed stepped forward to a salute. "Pardon, Señor Presidente," he replied, humbly. "We looked for you not to-day. It was only when Manuel here spied the signal from the vessel that we were able to believe you had really come at last. Had we expected you, excellency, the men would have been found prepared."

"Cleanliness is an essential part o' deescipline," retorted the other, unmoved. "Men will no fight weel, hae they na respect for theirsel's. Speer that now, will ye?" with an angry light in his eye as he snatched a rifle from one of the soldiers, and, sweeping his finger over the lock, displayed a streak of rust across his spotless glove. "It's sma' pride to ye, Captain Alvarez, to hae such as that to show me on my return."

"And yet, excellency," urged Alvarez, a trifle aggrievedly, "you cannot say we have not fought well. All the northern provinces are ours, and Sagua

and Valparaiso are ready to join in. We have only awaited your coming to commence our march against the capital."

"Ay," returned McNeilis, shortly, ever chary of bestowing his commendation, "I hae no fault to find wi' ye on that score." He paused, then added, grimly, casting his cold blue eyes along the line: "As for the rest, my lads, trust me to set things orderly, bide I am wi' ye a day or so. Now take me to your camp."

A couple of riflemen shouldered his box, and the little party threaded its way through the narrow defiles of the tropical wood, McNeilis striding ahead, while Alvarez trotted close behind him, volubly expatiating upon the victories achieved by the men under his command, and only showing abashment when his superior interrupted him with some short, searching question, or checked him to utter a cynical comment.

Andrew McNeilis was a soldier of fortune. The son of an Edinboro' cobbler, he had risen in the world solely by force of an unflinching courage and an indomitable will. He had run away from home when but a mere lad, and in his early days had roamed over more than half the world. He had been with Peary on that intrepid commander's dash toward the furthest north; had followed Emin Pasha into the heart of darkest Africa; had fought with Gordon in China, and with Crook on the western plains of North America.

Finally he had landed one day in Aureata, when that country, then merely a province of the larger state of Barataria, had just risen in revolt and declared itself a free and independent power.

McNeilis, with his inherent love of fair play and his inordinate craving for adventure, naturally espoused the cause of the weaker side, and cast in his lot with the Aureatans. Promotion was rapid. Step by step he was advanced from a captain of cavalry to the colonelcy of his regiment, then to the generalship of a brigade, and finally, through a daring act of prowess whereby the main strength of the enemy was surprised, routed and almost annihilated, to the supreme command of the army.

Fortune favored him. Victory followed victory, until at length the result so long sought was an accomplished fact. Barataria sued for peace, and to McNeilis was awarded all the credit of the triumph.

With the recognition of Aureata's independence and the establishment of a civil government, he was chosen the first president of the infant republic, and for five years ruled it wisely and well. True, there was little of democracy in his administration—it was the iron sway of a dictatorship pure and simple; but it was well suited to the needs of the turbulent, excitable folk he was called upon to govern. The Latin races require a master, and Aureata found an ideal one in McNeilis.

He allowed himself no intimates and no advisers, no friends and no confidants. "I—I am the State!" his attitude seemed constantly to proclaim; yet he steadfastly refrained from any misuse of his autocratic power. He tried to hold himself above human emotions and human frailties; to be ever unapproachable save on the side of abstract and impartial justice. Nor would he veer and tack to meet the wind of popular favor. He laid his own course, and by it he would abide, whatever tumult might thereby be aroused. He was the leader of his people, but not one with them; willing to listen to the plea of the humblest as he was to render his due unto the greatest, but apart from all—stern, solitary, unswerving as integrity itself.

Even the charms of women seemed to hold no fascination for him. Aureata was his mistress, and she claimed all that he had to give; for this adopted country of his was his idol and his dream. She symbolized his ambition, his hopes, his future.

And then came the cataclysm. Gold was discovered in the mountain ranges to the north, on territory mutually claimed by both Aureata and Barataria, there being a dispute as to the proper

interpretation of the clause in the treaty which at this point fixed the boundary line.

McNeilis paid scant heed to the pretensions of Barataria in the matter. Knowing her government to be weak, rent with dissension, and ineffective by reason of the corruption among her officials, and convinced, moreover, that his own contention was correct, he simply declined to admit the question to controversy; but, announcing his intention of holding the mooted territory at all hazards, dispatched a strong military force to guard the frontier.

Then, supremely regardless of any action which Barataria might see fit to take, he granted a concession for the working of the mines to an American syndicate headed by James Douglas.

Barataria, not relinquishing her claim, although she made no effort to enforce it, gave a similar concession to a London company; and so matters stood for a time, the American owners actively working the mines, while the Britishers were seemingly content with the empty honor of a titular control.

Gradually, however, and for a variety of reasons, the American management became intensely unpopular in Aureata; and the president was invoked to demand of it certain concessions which were palpably unreasonable.

McNeilis promptly refused, and thereupon, the agitation growing, the question rapidly took on the semblance of a political issue. The disaffection spread speedily among the people, and to such an alarming extent that many of the most prominent citizens, men, moreover, who had been uniformly friendly to his administration, pleaded with him to submit, or, at the least, to temporize and yield somewhat to the popular clamor.

When he had made his answer, they slunk from his presence like whipped curs. His blue eyes flashed fire, and the scar across his forehead stood out in a scarlet weal under the stress of his passion.

"When I soleecit counsel frae ony o' ye," he arrogantly declared, "it will be time enough for ye to bestow it. I hae made Aureata wi'out your asseestance, and, by God, I mean to keep it the same way!"

He laughed to scorn the idea of an outbreak among the people. He had seen disorder in the country before, he said, and he knew to what it would eventually amount. After the Aureatans had spent their energy in parades and mass meetings and public denunciations, they would revert to their former condition of heedless indolence, and all things would go on as before.

Ordinarily, perhaps, he would have been correct in this estimate; but on the present occasion there appeared to be some subtle, outside influence at work which kept more and more arousing the people, and finally the spirit of insubordination culminated in an open revolt.

McNeilis immediately dispatched a regiment or so of his troops to nip the incipient uprising in the bud; but when the government soldiers met the rebels in open engagement, they were surprised to find themselves opposed not by a mob of rioters, but by a drilled and superior force, armed with modern equipment, and officered by men who had evidently been schooled in European methods of warfare.

The result, which was naturally nothing less than a disastrous rout, proved a tremendous blow to McNeilis' prestige. His uniform ascendency had led the people to believe him of almost superhuman endowment, impervious to assault as a fortress of granite built upon the rock—now, with wider comprehension, they beheld his edifice resting solely on the shifting sands of fortune.

Characteristically fickle, his subjects —for, truth to tell, the Aureatans had been nothing more—hastened to desert his tottering column, and to acclaim the rising power; and, when McNeilis sought once more to grasp the oaken scepter of his sovereignty, he found it worm-eaten and inept, a bauble which crushed to nothingness in his hand.

The mutiny among his people spread, his army dwindled perceptibly by reason of the constant desertions, his

stanchest supporters grew weak-kneed and fearful.

Yet, with his usual stubborn inflexibility, he refused to accept the inevitable, and endeavored, as was his wont, to pluck success from the very heart of despair. But for once destiny turned her face against his efforts. Contest every inch and every fraction of an inch as he might, he could not breast the tide which had set in so strongly against him. Backward and backward it bore him, until at last even he was forced to recognize the struggle unavailing. Then, relinquishing everything to his foes, he fled the country.

The commander-in-chief of the victorious insurgents, General Antonio Valdes, according to the usual mode of procedure in such cases, was elected president and reigned in his stead.

Now, Valdes was a Baratarian at heart, an unreconstructed partisan of the old *régime;* and almost immediately upon his accession to the presidency he opened up the old question of the disputed boundary line.

A long-drawn controversy ensued between the two governments; but in the end the event which might have been foreseen transpired, and Aureata weakly gave up the rights which McNeilis had so vigorously striven to maintain, yielding her most valuable territory without striking a blow.

To McNeilis, chafing under his enforced exile in the United States, this pitiful abasement came like a revelation, making plain to him at last the inner economy of the entire sequence of events.

He sought out James Douglas, and asserted to him his firm conviction that the revolution from start to finish had been the affair of Great Britain, instigated by the London *concessionaires,* and carried through under the tacit connivance of the English Government.

"Why, everything points to it," he insisted. "Were na the insurgents armed wi' British rifles, officered by British soldiers? Wha e'er heard o' Valdes bestirring himsel' i' ony cause were he na weel paid forbye; and wheer, I ask, would he receive his pay, save frae British statesmanship? Wha reaps the benefeets? British capital; for Barataria, of course, ratified the old concession as soon as the land was safely 'twixt her claws."

He had small difficulty in convincing his hot-headed companion of the soundness of his hypothesis; and Douglas, once satisfied that his losses were due to English chicanery, determined to exact an ample redress.

Enlisting the services of Senator Wallace, who naturally was never averse to couching a lance against his hereditary foes, they endeavored to secure the intervention of the United States, on the ground that England had acted in violation of that sacred fetich, the Monroe Doctrine.

A voluminous interchange of diplomatic correspondence, together with the appointment, at high salaries, of a commission of eminent statesmen, for the purpose of taking testimony, followed; but the affair, so far as tangible results were concerned, amounted to nothing.

As Senator Wallace tersely put it in his report to the two interested men: "All we can arrive at is the old Scotch verdict, 'Guilty, but not proven.' We are convinced that England has done all that you claim; but we can't bring it home to her."

So matters rested. The months dragged by; Andrew McNeilis ate his ambitious heart out in inaction; the Valdes government burgeoned forth into a pomp of purple pageantry; the shrewd London capitalists declared rich dividends from the earnings of their mines.

But "even the weariest river winds somewhere safe to sea," and time bringeth all things to pass. One day the Aureatans awoke to the knowledge that there was a worm within their chestnut—they discovered that, after all, McNeilis' stern justice had pleased them better than the granting of corrupt privileges to the favored few; that simplicity of government is less costly than lavish splendor; that a low excise and a full treasury are vastly preferable to extortionate taxes and an impoverished exchequer.

Murmurs began to arise, disaffection spread, and finally the province of Sancta Espiritu, always favorable to McNeilis, rose in revolt, under the leadership of Captain Ramon Alvarez, the deposed president's former chief of staff.

Alvarez waged a successful, though guerrilla, warfare from the swamps and jungles, and at length succeeded in creating a condition where he deemed all that was necessary for the complete triumph of their arms was the return of their idol.

McNeilis had been thirsting for the chance, eagerly awaiting the summons; yet, when the call came, it found him singularly averse to answering it.

And now, when his foot once more pressed Aureatan soil, when, surrounded by his faithful followers, he assumed again the risks, the toil, the hardships and the danger which had ever been to him the very breath of life, he could not arouse within himself a spark of that enthusiasm which once would have thrilled him to the soul.

That night, long after his companions slept, he sat moodily smoking at the door of his tent, gazing toward the gorgeous yellow moon of the tropics, where it silvered the treetops and shed its radiance across the glade.

"See," said the corporal of the guard, pausing in his rounds to obtain a light for his cigarette from the sentry on post, "his excellency dreams of the future glory of Aureata."

But his excellency dreamed nothing of the sort. Indeed, his thoughts were far away, recalling in a half ecstatic vision how that same moon not ten days ago had rested on the glossy tresses of a nut-brown maid he knew of. It was after a dinner on Douglas' yacht, and they two had lingered late upon the deck, watching for the moon to rise over the waters while he told her something of his adventurous career, and also something of his hopes and dreams for the future.

And she had listened. That was all. But in her listening there was an exquisite sympathy, a quality of genuine comprehension which made it seem more precious than the speech of kings.

"Hoot, mon!" he exclaimed, rising to his feet and flinging away his cigar. "Ye are four and feefty year auld, ugly as Satan, and foreordained, I suppose, to dwell always on the crater o' a volcano. What right hae ye to think o' ony lass? No; it's Aureata that will be be McNeilis' only bride."

And yet, before he sank to rest, he went once more to gaze upon the moon.

TO BE CONTINUED.

WHY HE APPLAUDED

IT was a scientific lecture, and admission was free, but in spite of this the attendance was small. Besides being few in number, the members of the audience were very sparing in their applause. The lecturer was consequently disheartened.

Presently he observed a ragged fellow enter the hall and take a seat near the door. He evidently appreciated the lecturer's remarks, for he had not been listening five minutes before he commenced to applaud vigorously.

His enthusiasm seemed to stimulate the rest of the audience, for from that moment the applause grew frequent and unanimous, and the lecture passed off splendidly.

Deeply grateful to his ragged listener, the lecturer accosted him as he was leaving, and exclaimed, warmly:

"I was delighted to see that you appreciated my remarks."

"Appreciate nothin'!" was the reply. "I didn't even know what you was talkin' about. I seed the lecture was free, an' as it was cold outside, I came in out of the cold. I was just clappin' to warm myself."

WINNING HIS RIGHTS

By Edwin L. Sabin

Our amateur athletes possess a high sense of honor, as a rule, and seldom will one resort to unfair means to score a victory. When such an effort is made, however, it is liable to meet with a result very similar to that pictured by Mr. Sabin in his extremely well told story

BAREHEADED, and with bare ankles showing beneath the skirts of his gray bathrobe, Sherman entered the broad gateway of the athletic field. Hands thrust into the two side pockets of his flowing gown, he stood for a moment surveying the oval with its animated figures, and inviting the golden flood of the sun to soak him through and through.

All seemed very good—as does everything in the first warm days of spring. It seemed good to have over one the blue sky, instead of the dull timbers of the gymnasium; and under one the soft, vitalizing dirt, instead of the hard, dead surface of the indoor track. It seemed good to change from those monotonous rounds betwixt walls and beneath roof to the sweeping expanse of the open air. It seemed good to hear the murmured comments of the critic spectators who, now that outdoor training had set in, each afternoon assembled at the field.

"There's 'Jig' Sherman."

"Here's the old reliable; can't keep *him* off!"

"There's Sherman, the miler. Know him?"

"He's the man who got third place last year, isn't he?"

"Yes; he was Smithe's mate. He didn't have much of a show, you see. But this year he was right in line for the championship, if that new Law, Rodgers, hadn't shown up."

"Hard luck. Anyway, he's no quitter."

Quite a sprinkling of brother athletes had preceded him, and were scattered about the grounds, their white suits, occasionally contrasted with a scarlet sweater, making pretty spots of color upon the bursting turf. At one end of the oval the pole vaulters and the high jumpers were at work, and at the other end Jones and Burrell were assiduously throwing the discus. Several contestants in the runs were patiently jogging around the track; and Henderson, a freshman who was promising to be a flier, some day, in the mile, grinned as he loped by, in response to Sherman's kindly nod.

Although now, with his last intercollegiate field meet upon him, he saw himself balked, after all, of the championship which so long he had coveted, for which so long he had faithfully striven, Sherman was glad that he had yielded to his better nature and had come out to-day as usual. There is much in sport for sport's sake; and while he would have liked to finish by winning, blood will tell, his love for athletics was healthy, and here he was.

Still, when a fellow has tried gamely for three years, and has steadily improved from freshman to senior, it is hard for him to have his hopes blasted in the midst of his fourth year, just when he is attaining the goal.

As a freshman Sherman had been willing, but raw; as a sophomore he had made the track team; as a junior

he had been mate to Smithe, the 'varsity crack, and by running not his own race, but Smithe's, according to instructions, he had materially aided that individual to take firsts against remarkably strong fields.

Smithe had graduated that June, and Sherman was picked by experts as his legitimate successor in championship honors. He was as confident as anybody, for he knew that he had it in him. Through three years and more he had dreamed of winning for his college, and now he had arrived. He was about to reap the benefit of his wait. The trainer had declared it—and the trainer never spoke idly.

So Sherman's position seemed established, until the fatal midwinter indoor meet. From the gymnasium he had plunged for his room, with burning, rebellious heart. The 'varsity daily, *Sub Rosa,* in its next issue, calmly explained the situation.

The midwinter indoor meet, held at the gym. last night, brought out a new star in the person of K. B. Rodgers, Law '05, who in the mile astonished everybody by handily defeating Sherman, Liberal Arts '04, and breaking the indoor record. Sherman has been looked upon generally as the winner in the next intercollegiate. Rodgers entered the law school at the opening of the year as a junior, and his abilities as a track man were entirely unsuspected. He comes from Illinois.

"Too bad, Jig, old chap!" sympathized Sherman's roommate, following him shortly from the gym. "Why couldn't the beggar have waited until next year? We had the mile cinched without him, and all he's done is to knock you out of your deserts. Let him try for some other distance. *He's* another year to go in, and you haven't."

Sherman said nothing.

"It's a shame that you've got to be pacemaker again—and that's what it looks like," complained the aggrieved Jimmie.

Sherman did not answer. He only proceeded mechanically with his preparations for bed.

"Look here, Jig—you can beat him! You've *got* to beat him! You didn't half run your race to-night!" persisted his roommate. "What was the matter with you?"

"Matter?" repeated Sherman, engaged with a hard knot in a shoe lace. "The matter was that I was beaten by a better man."

In this Sherman erred. He might have been beaten by a better runner, but not by a better man. There is a difference.

While struggling with the knot in his shoe lace, he also was struggling with a knot in his brain. He solved them both simultaneously. On a sudden—almost even as he spoke—he knew when and where he had seen Rodgers before.

"By jiminy! Sure enough!" he exclaimed.

"What struck you?" queried his roommate, startled.

"Oh, nothing. Tell you later," parried Sherman, thoughtfully.

But he didn't—at least, not till very much later; later than he at the moment was anticipating.

The preceding summer he had visited for a week in Bodford, a little county seat of the Northwest. At the county fair he had witnessed, with interest, an athletic program, and the person who had taken the purses in the half mile and mile was—Rodgers; not Rodgers there, but under an assumed name. Spectators had claimed that he was a professional footracer.

As soon as Sherman had scanned him, in trunks and shirt, on the gym. floor, a vague, hazy memory had arisen and beckoned onward like a tantalizing will-o'-the-wisp. Rodgers looked like somebody, but who? When? Where?

This was a week before the indoor meet. Rodgers had worn a heavy mustache. The night of the meet the mustache was gone—sacrificed to suit the whim of some of the owner's colleagues, with whom, by reason of his rude, overbearing disposition, he was decidedly unpopular.

And now, stimulated further by the smooth face, Sherman's memory waxed more insistent and annoying. It bothered Sherman through all the meet, until, in the midst of his taking off his

shoes afterward, in a flash it cleared, disclosing the Bodford county fair; and Sherman knew—knew as to the "who, when and where."

Here was a professional competing with amateurs. It was not fair. Besides, if perchance Rodgers was not a professional in practice, in theory he had made himself so by running for money and under an assumed name. This act alone barred him from entering the amateur lists, and he must know it.

All right, thought Sherman, exultantly; as soon as the matter came to the ears of the board of athletic control of the 'varsity, Rodgers would be ousted as ineligible, he himself would have, and justly, the laurels, and, withal, the 'varsity would be as well off, for he could win, and win he would.

Sherman took the knowledge to bed with him; and although before they went to sleep he was on the point, several times, of unbosoming to his loyal chum and mate, Jimmie, by morning he had changed his mind. It was better that he tell nobody, not even Jimmie. The word must not be traced back, for then he would be accused of jealousy. Merely a few lines, anonymous, to the 'varsity authorities, or to a rival college, would be quite sufficient. Yes, that was the better way.

So, returned from eight o'clock lecture, and with Jimmie safe in the chemical lab., Sherman sat before the study table in his room and wrote a note. He tore it up and wrote another on a bit of plain wrapping paper; writing laboriously, with pencil; forming his letters contrary to their usual fashion. This note he inclosed in an ordinary cheap envelope, and in the same laborious, painstaking manner addressed it to "Board of Athletic Control"—and hesitated.

Should it be the university or an outside college?

He completed the address with the name of the 'varsity's special rival, and town and State. A dull flush stained his cheeks as he surveyed the envelope and turned it over. He moistened the mucilage of the flap and paused. He thought that he heard a step, and, starting, hastily tucked the envelope under the cloth. But 'twas nothing save his uneasy conscience, and, extracting the envelope, he slowly pressed into place the flap. He paused again. He sat for a moment limp and irresolute. Suddenly, with an energetic movement, he tore the envelope and contents into a score of pieces.

"I can't and I won't!" he declared. "Never! Let him run, for all of me!"

And having torn the bits still smaller, he stalked out of the room.

"Come, come, man!" urged the stumpy trainer that afternoon, exasperated over Sherman's spiritless performance. "Put life into your stride! Don't run so long in one spot! You're not dancing a schottische—you're racing!"

But the trainer's most earnest implorations or most cutting sarcasm failed to lift Sherman's practice above the mediocre.

"You run around the track, now, for six or seven laps, and then get your rub," bade the trainer.

He gazed after Sherman's trim figure for a moment and grunted.

"Too bad!" he muttered. "Heart's been taken out of him, I'm afraid. Hard luck to have that Rodgers butt in. I wish he had Rodgers' legs; that's all worth having about the son-of-a-gun, anyway! Then Mr. Rodgers might fall off the earth, for all I care!

"Don't half like that Rodgers, anyhow!" mumbled the trainer, making his way to the further end of the gym. "Where's he run before? You'd think, from all you can get out of him, he was born running! But I suppose I'm hired to train, and not to stick my finger too deep in the pie."

The trainer's views regarding Rodgers were those of the 'varsity generally. Rodgers was by no means a favorite off the track. He had few friends, and scarcely a person but was sorry to have Sherman once more relegated to second fiddle. But on the track Rodgers was a crackerjack, and no mistake. Not a person might deny it.

The winter days passed, and Rodgers'

standing as an amateur remained apparently unquestioned. In practice he continued to be Sherman's master, and that individual had lapsed into a hopeless state which told sadly upon the spirit of his performances. His last chance to win a first—to gain the 'varsity letter, the nine 'rahs, and a name imperishable upon the tablets of college memory—had been meanly taken from him; and as the trainer had said, his heart had been taken, too.

Now had arrived spring and outdoor training. The busy, watchful trainer must have noted at once Sherman's appearance on the field, for from afar he shouted and beckoned. Sherman sauntered across and met him halfway.

"Good!" commented the trainer. "We were wondering why you didn't turn up. Off with that bathrobe, and trot around the track, and when you're limbered up I want to hold the watch on you. We've got to squeeze all we can out of this pleasant spell, so be doing something."

"Where's Rodgers?" asked Sherman, obediently doffing his robe.

"Dunno," replied the trainer, gruffly.

Leaving the bathrobe in a careless heap, Sherman picked his way across the tender grass to the track. He had only started upon his easy jog adown the cindered course, when he was hailed and halted by Bates, the track-team captain, who approached, accompanied by Rodgers in running togs.

"Say, Jig," demanded Bates, with scant ceremony, "I want to know for sure whether there's anything can be brought against you to keep you out of the meets. I'm making the rounds and asking every fellow separate."

"Why, what's up?" inquired Sherman.

"Well, I got a note from 'prexie,'" explained Captain Bates, "and last night he gave me a long talk about the team. He says this year he wants the 'varsity to be represented by men who are above suspicion. He doesn't want any fussing, and protests, and kicking, like there usually is in the papers and around. It hurts the 'varsity. He wants the team to be amateur out and out, and if the 'varsity can't show that it can win with such a team, he'd rather it wouldn't try to win at all. That's the way he feels, and that's the way the faculty feels. There was so much howling last year about professionalism that this year he's going to prove the 'varsity stands for clean athletics. I told him that so far as I knew our men were strictly amateurs, but I'd canvass them again, just for luck. Nice old chap, 'prexie' is—only, as I hinted, seems to me that the college that's too honest comes out at the little end. But you ought to have heard how he sat on me, and laid it down that when athletics are dishonest they're a detriment instead of a benefit, and we don't want that kind here; and that the 'varsity did not consider a man could be true to it by being false to himself. So there we are! It's up to us, I reckon. We're on honor. As long as I'm captain, what the 'prexie' says goes."

"All right, Bobbie; I'll think myself over while doing my stunts," promised Sherman, lightly, but recognizing that his captain was in earnest.

"You'd better," warned that personage, good-naturedly, turning away to accost another youth. "Rodgers says *he's* O. K."

Sherman resumed his jog.

"Warming up?" remarked Rodgers, condescendingly, falling in beside him.

"Yes," said Sherman.

"That's right," commended Rodgers. "Thought I'd come out myself."

His tone conveyed the idea that, of course, practice, for him, was quite unnecessary. Just as the trainer had grumbled, one might have concluded that Rodgers was born a runner, all ready to toe the mark. He had about him an irritating atmosphere of superiority which ground mightily on most people. The same loftiness toward college ways that had lost him his mustache—now growing again—extended to college athletics. He viewed them with an amused attitude which stung, and which would have brought upon a less able performer caustic reproof from trainer and captain.

But, as the trainer had declared, "he

delivered the goods," and as long as he did this, he would be given a little leeway.

"That president of yours must be a sort of Puritan," asserted Rodgers, a trace of contempt in his tone.

"He's your president, too, isn't he?" retorted Sherman, nettled. "You can call him a Puritan, if you want to, but that doesn't prevent his being one of the finest old men that ever lived! You'll never find anybody saying anything against 'prexie'."

"He's behind the times on athletics, though," scoffed Rodgers, assuredly. "The thing to do nowadays is to win."

"I don't know; strikes me he's *ahead* of the times, rather," returned Sherman. "And for one I'm mighty glad that the 'varsity's going to make a stand for clean teams."

Rodgers laughed—a laugh that was a scoff.

They loped on in silence. For Sherman, the brief conversation with Captain Bates had imposed a shadow upon the bright afternoon. As he loped he winked rapidly, which was his habit when thinking hard, and his face had a puzzled, worried expression.

Should he tell Bates what he knew, or continue to hold his peace? The matter lay before him in new guise. The reputation of the 'varsity, he argued, must be considered. The president had made personal request—and who would not do anything in the world for "prexie"? If Rodgers was protested on the eve of a field meet—and, although Bodford seemed below the college horizon, nevertheless, when points were to be gained, perhaps, protests dropped from the very sky—after the 'varsity had advertised its stand for strict amateurism, what a clamor of derision and scorn would arise around about! How rival institutions, less particular, would chuckle.

Yes, for the sake of the 'varsity, for the sake of "prexie," for the example to be set the track teams of the future, since Rodgers was brazening it out, somebody else must tell.

Confound Rodgers! Why couldn't he do his own confessing? Why should he put the whole team in danger of disrepute? Sherman chafed under the thought, and savagely dug in his spikes.

"I say, Rodgers," he spoke, suddenly, "didn't I see you up at Bodford last summer?"

"Bodford—where?" inquired Rodgers, quickly.

"Montana," informed Sherman. "I was at the county fair when you ran in the half mile and mile."

"Must have been some one who looked like me," alleged Rodgers, with a show of carelessness.

"No, it was you," insisted Sherman. "You were under a different name, that's all."

"Well, what of it?" demanded Rodgers, boldly.

"I can't understand how you may run for money and claim to be an amateur," observed Sherman, quietly.

"What are you going to do about it?" scowled Rodgers.

"The question is, what are *you* going to do about it?" corrected Sherman. "You told Bates you're all right, didn't you? And you know——"

"I suppose, then, you'll blab, so as to get me out of the way?" sneered Rodgers.

"That wouldn't be the reason at all," denied Sherman, hotly.

"Well, that's what it would look like," sneered Rodgers. "Everybody knows I can beat you, and if you get me fired, Sherman, I'll make life so miserable for you you'll wish you'd never been born. That's what I'll do, my boy! There'll be plenty of people thinking that I could have stayed, for all of you, if I'd agreed to let you win first place. See? That'll be *my* side of the case, and don't you forget it! You little runt! Now blab; I dare you to!"

With that Rodgers turned at right angles and made off on a dogged trot through the gate.

Sherman continued. He was boiling—but even in his anger he realized that Rodgers had defied him, not without good judgment. Yes; people would

say that it was spite work! That it was dishonorable! Some would say it, naturally; others would be given a hint by Rodgers himself.

And, really, was he wholly disinterested, so far as himself was concerned, in exposing Rodgers? He could not decide. He meant to be; he wanted to be. Only, *could* he be?

On a sudden a fierce, confident determination swelled within him. No; he could not tell—yet. But there was another way out of it. He would beat Rodgers; *he would beat Rodgers.* And then he could tell, and no one would be able to charge up selfish motives! Ay, he would beat Rodgers!

His immediate past smote him with shame and regret. He had been a "quitter"; a "quitter" in spirit, if not in limb. He had resigned himself to take what he might get, instead of spurring himself on to get what he might take. He had sulked. He had not been true to the 'varsity. He felt wild over the time that he had wasted. But he must beat Rodgers! He would beat him at the home field meet, and earn the right to impeach him.

"Here!" interrupted the trainer. "That'll do. I want to catch your time once, now. Rest up a minute. Clear those other fellows off the track, somebody. Rodgers go in?"

"Yes," replied Sherman.

"Humph!" commented the trainer.

"Ready?" he inquired, presently. "All right. There's your mark. Do it in the best you can. Now—if this blamed gun'll ever go off!"

The pistol went off; so did Sherman. Around the track he swung with long, easy strides, never slackening, a quarter mile, the half mile, and as the word that "Jig Sherman's running against time" spread, all the athletic field stopped operations and admiringly watched.

The three-quarters, and his pace quickened. He was beating Rodgers; that is what in thought he was doing; he was beating Rodgers. The idea nerved every step. The last eighth. He spurted again. The spectators generously cheered.

"Good!" he heard the trainer, with the click of the stopwatch, say, as he pegged past.

"What was it?" he asked, having pulled up and walked back, panting.

"Well," responded the trainer, with a grin, "that's for me to know, since I'm not saying, am I? But it was considerably under a half hour."

He took Sherman by the bare arm and led him to one side.

"What's got into you, all of a sudden? You never made better in your life. *Now* you're *running* some! Man alive, but I'm glad to see it! That slump of yours was awful. Keep up your gait, now, and something's liable to happen; I won't say what—but you just keep going. That's all!"

And with a parting squeeze of the elbow he left Sherman a-tingle.

As the days went by it became generally known that between Sherman and Rodgers existed a chasm not warranted by merely athletic rivalry. They avoided each other whenever possible, and took pains not to train together. Sherman never spoke of Rodgers save when absolutely necessary, and then in the briefest manner. Rodgers, on the other hand, was nothing loath to speak of Sherman, but in a sneering, tolerant, almost disparaging way. The 'varsity wondered; but although Jimmie, Sherman's roommate, received many a question, he was unable to return a satisfactory reply.

As for the trainer—*he* never said anything, anyway. He was a living Sphinx.

One thing, however, was sure: The contest in the mile between Sherman and Rodgers was going to be the hottest contest on the home field meet program.

The day of the meet dawned cloudless, bright and sparkling. The little 'varsity town quickly bloomed forth in scarlet—the 'varsity color. At noon the crowd began to flow into the grounds. Speedily the amphitheater was packed, the carriage space was filled, and people were pushing against the rail where they might glimpse the

finishes. Sections vied with each other in chanting the 'varsity yell:

Hoo-rah-rah!
Hoo-rah-rah!
'Varsity! 'Varsity!
Rah! Rah! Rah!
Westland! Westland! Westland!

The hundred-yard dash, the pole vault and the shot put passed off.

"All out for the mile run!" announced the trainer, into the dressing room under the amphitheater, where Sherman was lying on his back. Rodgers, disdaining to appear as if resting, was outside, watching, with others privileged to the inner rail, what was happening.

Sherman threw off his blanket, and sprang to his feet. Jimmie, his *fidus Achates,* who had been obligingly rubbing his legs, gave a final polish, and, slapping him on the back, implored:

"Go in and beat him, Jig. You can do it!"

"You watch and see," said Sherman, grimly.

Which was the most that he had said yet.

Followed by Henderson, the freshman, and Doxy, another youth with aspirations that might some day be gratified, Sherman emerged upon the track. Rodgers was already there.

"What's the matter with Sherman?" demanded the cheer masters.

"He's all right!" roared the response.

"What's the matter with Henderson?" and "What's the matter with Doxy?" earned each its "All Right!"

"What's the matter with Rodgers?"

The crowd sniggered.

"He's all wrong!" piped a daring voice.

Rodgers sneered.

With his hairy limbs and dark face and mustache of a man, he showed strongly beside his stripling competitors.

The four lined up; Henderson on the inside, Doxy next, Sherman next, and Rodgers on the outside.

"Ready? Set. Crack!"

At the report of the pistol they were off. Sherman immediately jumped to the front and took the inside. He had resolved that he would never be headed. He would take the lead and keep it. He would keep it or die in the attempt. Rodgers should stay behind.

He knew that he was setting a rattling pace. Never before had he dared to start in so. Instinctively he felt that some one was hanging at his elbow, and, glancing out of the corner of his eye, he caught a glimpse of Rodgers. He quickened his stride. The bustle of interest in the amphitheater, and in the crowd extending from either end of it, had died away behind him. He now distinguished the crunching of his own spikes and of those of his pursuer. As for Henderson and Doxy, they must have been left at once in the rear and were out of hearing.

Before him was the level track, with here and there along its edge a spectator.

Crunch! Crunch! Crunch!

He fell to stroking himself—one, two; one, two; one, two—as a method of holding his stride to the standard that he had imposed.

Crunch! Crunch! Crunch!

Ever unvarying, distinct, menacing, persisted that steady pursuit.

The grand stand was drawing near, marking the completion of the quarter mile and first lap. And now the grand stand was on its feet, yelling. And now they had passed it.

"Run him out, Jig!"

"Go it, Sherman!"

"Don't let him foul you!"

The cheers ceased. The crowd settled back.

The second lap; and the timers, knowing in what the half had been done, well understood the trainer, as, peering anxiously after the two figures, he said, half to himself, with a dubious shake of the head:

"They'll never keep it up. It's too fast."

The third lap was completed; and around the first turn on the last lap, and down the straight track, with the amphitheater across the field, toiled the runners. Sherman s mouth and throat were dry, and his breath whistled noisily through his nostrils. It seemed to him that if he did not open his mouth

for air he would suffocate. But obstinately he held his stride at its top notch—one, two; one, two; one, two.

And now he had changed it to: "Beat Rodgers; beat Rodgers; beat Rodgers"—over and over, a mechanical battle cry.

Crunch! Crunch! Crunch!

The spikes of the specter pushing him relentlessly.

Long back Henderson and Doxy, badly outclassed, had given up, and, amazed, were looking upon the struggle between their masters.

Beneath Sherman the track went streaming rearward, and at his left reeled the weeds and tall grasses in a goblin dance. His feet and legs were numb, and his knees were, oh, so tired; but he forced them to his bidding.

"Beat Rodgers; beat Rodgers; beat Rodgers!"

The final turn. Suddenly he was aware that a glimmer of white was appearing at his right shoulder. The vision brought him despair. He clinched his teeth tighter, and threw back his head, and summoned every ounce of his being to aid him in making his legs reach out further and move faster.

"You—*runt!*"

It was Rodgers' voice, hoarsely gasping a malediction, like a threat, in his ear.

They were halfway down the home stretch. The glimmer of white stuck at his shoulder. Was it going to pass him? He could not do any more. His muscles positively refused to obey the frantic call of his mind. His knees were liable to give out any moment. He was dimly conscious that on ahead was a turmoil, brought about by the white glimmer at his side. Now his mouth was open, but he did not know this. However, he would not have cared. He had cast "form" to the winds. Bulldog stubbornness was all the "form" that he had left.

The glimmer of white grew less, gradually—then, on a sudden, vanished.

"Ya-a-ah! Blast you!"

Something struck the back of his knees, and, losing his balance, he plunged forward on his hands, recovered, wavered, kept his feet, went staggering on, on, seeing nothing, well-nigh knowing nothing except that he must "beat Rodgers; beat Rodgers; beat Rodgers"; and while a confused mass of colors tossed on either side, and a confused uproar rang in his dull ears, seeing the string before him, he lurched across it and let himself fall in a heap.

He *had* beaten Rodgers.

He smiled faintly as they carried him into the dressing room. He would have liked to walk, to show that he was game, but they would not suffer him. When his heart had ceased its tremendous thumping, and he felt not so dizzy, he opened his eyes, and found Captain Bates sitting beside him on one side, fanning, and Jimmie on the other, while several of his team mates were gazing curiously down upon him.

"Say, but that was a race!" informed Jimmie, grinning. "You beat him, old man. He's done up worse than you, too."

"That was a dirty trick he played you, Jig. Did you know it?" asked Captain Bates. "He found out he couldn't pass you, so he pretended to fall, and tripped you up!"

"And then he *did* fall," chuckled Jimmie. "Cut his head against a post, and somebody carried him home in a buggy."

"I beat him, then, fair?" inquired Sherman, eagerly.

"You bet you did," assured the captain. "You beat him, and you clipped the State record fifteen seconds! Why, man, you ran an awful race! You got down into professional time. Even Smithe wouldn't be in it with you this year."

"Rodgers *is* a professional—I saw him run last summer," said Sherman, pale but determined.

"You did! Then why in the dickens didn't you tell us?" demanded Captain Bates, aghast.

"I would have, but—don't you see?—'twould have looked as though I was putting him out of the way because he could beat me," pleaded Sherman. "So I thought I'd wait. I made up my mind

that people shouldn't say I was afraid of him."

"You old swab, you!" ejaculated Jimmie. "*That's* what's been the matter, is it?"

Captain Bates laid a brotherly hand upon Sherman's wet brow, and tenderly smoothed back the hair.

"Fellows," he said, looking around, "Sherman's a brick! And as for that man Rodgers, whether he's a professional or not—and if Sherman says he is, he is—we don't want him on the track team."

"And we don't need him, either," laughed Henderson.

"Coming 'round?" queried the trainer, sticking in his head.

"Sure," replied Bates.

"Good!" commented the trainer.

"Is Rodgers hurt much?" asked Sherman, anxiously.

"Naw," said the trainer. "Only got what was coming to him, anyway."

He disappeared. As if at a signal, swelled without the chorus:

Hoo-rah-rah!
Hoo-rah-rah!
'Varsity! 'Varsity!
Rah! Rah! Rah!
Sherman! Sherman! Sherman!

Sherman gave a contented little sigh.

DECLINED WITH THANKS

AN admirer of a well-known magazine editor sent him a bulldog the other day as a present. Unfortunately, this editor has a peculiar aversion to canines, and, besides, he did not care to be under any obligations to a stranger, so he had the animal shipped back, at the same time ordering his stenographer to forward to the owner a polite note of thanks for the gift, and expressing regret that he was not able to accept it.

"Will you dictate the letter?" asked the stenographer.

"No, no!" said the editor, who happened to be very busy at that moment. "Write it yourself! With all the experience you've had with manuscripts, you ought to have tact enough to decline a bulldog without giving offense."

"All right, sir," meekly responded the young lady; and two days later the bulldog fancier received back his canine contribution, accompanied by the following highly polite and more or less satisfactory note of explanation:

DEAR SIR: We regret that we are compelled to decline the bulldog you kindly submitted to us. We have carefully examined it and are sincerely sorry that it does not seem wholly available for our use. Of course, you are aware that many considerations besides quality must govern the acceptance of bulldogs, and the rejection of any particular bulldog does not necessarily imply that it is lacking in merit. There may be so large a number of accepted bulldogs on hand that it is deemed best not to increase the supply. This and a hundred other reasons may cause the rejection of an offered bulldog, without reference to its intrinsic worth. The simple fact of refusal, therefore, does not carry with it any adverse judgment as to the excellence of a bulldog, but is merely a statement of the fact that it cannot be utilized at the present time. These general reasons for the return of unavailable bulldogs we trust will excuse us from giving anything more specific or offering criticism in any particular case.

With thanks for your courtesy, we are, very truly yours.

A New Series by Cutcliffe Hyne

EDITORIAL ANNOUNCEMENT

IN the September number of THE POPULAR MAGAZINE we will publish the first of a new series of stories by Cutcliffe Hyne. Several years ago, when Mr. Hyne created the character of *Captain Kettle*, he took the reading public of both this country and England by storm. Since then we have been waiting for another such character. The series that will commence in next month's POPULAR will introduce you to *Commander McTurk*, an *American* naval officer, who is even more interesting than his predecessor. Listen to what Mr. Hyne himself says about this character: "Commander John Kelly McTurk, United States navy, is the most ultra-patriotic American it is possible to think of. He is firmly convinced that the position of an officer in the United States navy is the best in the world, but he constantly exceeds instructions. He annexes a South Sea Island, hoists the Stars and Stripes and almost precipitates a war with Germany. He champions cranky Gloucester fisherman, and is captured by a British cruiser. He runs a cargo of food and ammunition through the fog and Togo's blockade at Port Arthur for the sake of 'giving the actual experience of a United States navy officer on the value of a modern, high speed, steam blockade.' He is boastful, kind-hearted, shrewd in money matters, but utterly without capacity for getting money and chronically without sufficient cash to carry out his schemes; brave as a rat when it comes to a pinch; a shocking bad shot, but A1 with his fists." If you want to see what he looks like, watch for the cover of the September POPULAR when it appears on the news stands.

There are other things to make the September number a prize for the lover of good fiction. "*The Ship Owner,*" a serial by Morgan Robertson; "*Annabel's Wager,*" a sparkling tale of Cavalier and Roundhead days, by Rafael Sabatini; "*In Defense of Honor,*" a stirring novelette of army life; "*The Ghost of La Moissine,*" an absorbing story by Clinton Dangerfield,—these are only a few selections made at random from the list of good things in next month's issue of THE POPULAR. Besides these, there are other serials and short stories, each a gem in its way and each fascinating above all things. So, sum it all up, we feel sure that when you see next month's issue you will agree that it makes a new standard of excellence for a fiction magazine and is by far the best that we have ever produced.

THE PRIVATE WAR

Being the Truth About Gordon Traill: His Personal Statement

By Louis Joseph Vance

Author of "Terence O'Rourke, Gentleman Adventurer," "The Test," Etc.

SYNOPSIS OF CHAPTERS PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED.

Gordon Traill, a wealthy young society man of New York, goes to London with the avowed intention of wooing and winning, if he can, the young and beautiful widow of Sir Henry Venables-Herbert, who, as Miss Julia Leigh, of Richmond, was Traill's old sweetheart. He arrives just as a dense fog has settled over the city, which is the cause of his having a strange adventure through which he is brought into touch with his old friend, Anthony Sevrance; Kurd von Holzborn, a German attaché, who, Traill soon learns, is the recently accepted fiancé of Lady Venables-Herbert; and a Russian diplomat named De Netze. It soon develops that the last two are engaged in some conspiracy which exposes them to considerable peril, though Traill is not informed as to the nature of it. Traill and Lady Herbert see each other, from a distance, at the opera, and the next morning he receives a note from her asking him to call at a certain time. When he goes, however, he learns that she has suddenly left town.

CHAPTER V—(*Continued*).

IN a way, however, he was right. When we had reached Sevrance's rooms in Lord's Chambers, we found news of a sort awaiting us. Grady, Sevrance's man, an undersized, alert and good-natured Irish boy, opened the door for us.

"Any letters?" Sevrance demanded, instantly.

"One, sor," said the man. "But not f'r yer honor, sor. 'Tis for Misther Traill."

He beamed benevolently upon me. "'Tis in a la-ady's hand, sor," he volunteered.

"Then give it me, instantly!" I cried. "Why the deuce are you standing there grinning?"

I suppose our two faces, adorned with similar expressions of impatience, alarmed him. He turned and, in a twinkling, had the note on a salver and was handing it to me with a deferential bending of his shoulders.

"Begging yer honor's pardon, sor," he explained, "but 'twas delivered be a bit of a missinger la-ad thot took to his heels and was gone th' minute he'd stuck ut into me hand, sor."

Little cared I how or by what means the note had come. It was sufficient that I held it—even though in fingers that trembled so with emotion that I could scarcely tear the flap.

Already I had recognized my Heart's Desire's handwriting in the superscription. To my dismay, when finally I managed to open it, the inclosure proved to be no more than a handful—or less—of torn paper!

I swore. The best part of the little fragments fluttered from my hands to the rug. Sevrance stared; and Grady, after a moment of wide-eyed astonishment, got upon his knees and began to scrape the paper together, like the well-trained servant that he was.

This story began in the June issue. The back numbers can be obtained through any newsdealer. Price, ten cents each.

"In Heaven's name," Sevrance demanded, blankly, "what does that mean?"

"You've your question for your pains," I told him, sourly.

"But surely——!" He paused. "Hold on!" he exclaimed. "There's a chance—— Grady, give me those papers!"

"What——" I began.

"The note has been torn," explained Sevrance, irritably. "I don't know why, you idiot! But we'll piece it together and——"

He bent over the study table, sorting the pieces out under the glow of the student's lamp, his eyes intent. I peered over his shoulder in a fever of anxiety.

It was a tedious task. That double sheet of note paper had been torn infinitesimally fine. Many of the fragments were naturally quite blank; indeed, the majority were so. Many simply would not fit in—and all such were blank. Others appeared to be missing, nor could the utmost ingenuity at the command of both of us supply the lost words.

But in the end, after a half hour's hard and exasperatingly slow work, we were able, with some difficulty, to make out the following message—the whole beneath the family crest and town address of Lady Herbert:

Gordon, I need you. I shan't be able to . . . . . when you call to-morrow afternoon. I am com . . ed to leave town at once and cannot foreca . . . . day of my return. It is against my wil . . I feel as if . . . . . and am helpless in this . . . . but I count upon you who . . . . . zborn's safety. . . . Come to me, then, at once if ever you . . . . . I shall be at . . . .

That was all. The final words were evidently written in unusual haste, and the last few were almost illegible, the ultimate "at" being a mere scrawl, ending in a long dash, as though the pen had been dragged hurriedly across the paper.

I threw myself, bewildered and disgruntled, into a chair; Sevrance turned and faced me, his calm a trifle less assumed than was his wont.

"Good Lord, my dear boy!" he exclaimed, breathlessly. "What a—an enigma!"

"Enigma!" I cried, angrily. "Enigma be damned!" I rose and walked the length of the room. "She mentioned his name," I mused aloud. A gust of rage took me by the throat. "He's responsible for this!" I cried.

"Who, may I ask?"

"That damned Prussian pig!"

"Traill," commented Sevrance, dispassionately, his assurance restored, "you've a marvelous faculty for pithy characterization!"

CHAPTER VI.

THE TELEPHONE.

Disconsolately, I threw myself into a chair and began to nurse my head with both hands. Sevrance began one of his meditative walks up and down the room—hands clasped behind back, head bowed, brows thoughtful, lips tight, legs swinging methodically, fifteen steps one way, wheeling on the heel, fifteen steps back again.

The monotonous sound of his measured footfalls wore upon my nerves. I was sick at heart and wanted comforting—wanted the sound of a friendly voice and the empty solace of hollowly optimistic phrases. When I had endured the silence—Grady had discreetly retired—as long as I could, I snapped at my friend.

"Oh, for Heaven's sake, say something!" said I, spitefully.

Sevrance paused by the window; I did not look up, but knew that his eyes were upon me.

He whistled softly. "Thunder!" he complied, cheerfully, and recommenced his constitutional.

I restrained an impulse to throw something at him, and fell into a deep and despondent mood, pondering vainly the mystery of this latest happening.

What the devil could it all mean, anyhow?

I was ready to accept the unusual incidents attending upon my arrival in London as a part of a drama wherein I was no more than a supernumerary—an insignificant factor, making my entrance and my exit both in one scene.

The affair of Monsieur de Netze was strange enough, but the business of that gentleman, in his capacity as a secret agent of the czar, furnished an all-sufficient explanation for the attack upon him.

That, then, I was ready to drop—to relegate to the back of my mind as something to be remembered with interest as an extraordinary adventure, but not calling for prolonged study in order to be solved. In short, Monsieur de Netze had been the victim of a gang of nihilists. Well and good—that was over and done for.

But this affair of my Heart's Desire—what did *it* portend? On what grounds might I explain this decidedly out of the ordinary communication?

Up to the very moment of my receipt of Lady Herbert's message, there should have been, to a dispassionate judgment, nought strange or unusual in the affair.

I had arrived in London; under uncommon, but not inexplicable, circumstances I had made the acquaintance of my sweetheart's fiancé, a man whom I was disposed to regard—naturally—in the guise of a dangerous rival. But he himself, so far as I knew, had no reason for so considering me.

We had met, then; had conceived for each other a respectable and dignified dislike—so I believed, at least—and had parted. Some hours later I had encountered the same gentleman in Covent Garden, whither he escorts his betrothed a moment or so following upon her recognition of me. Nothing strange in that.

A thousand explanations might account for Lady Herbert's sudden departure from the city, and the canceling of her invitation to Sevrance and myself to take tea with her and Mrs. Morchester. In the ordinary course of events, I might have expected a note of regret from her at almost any time within the next few days, or even weeks.

In short, my vain misgivings had gone without justification until that moment, when Grady had handed me Lady Herbert's mysterious note.

That, alone, was inexplicable.

I tried desperately to fit a cause to this development. Why, under what imaginable pressure of circumstances, had she composed that message? What had induced her to tear it into such minute shreds? And what had moved her to reconsider, to gather those fragments of paper together, inclose them in an envelope and dispatch them to me by messenger?

Why had she not rewritten her note? It had been as baffling as a clever cipher, the solving of it as trying to my patience as would prove the long hours which still stood between me and my meeting with her.

I harried my brain with whys and wherefores until I was nigh frantic; night closed down upon London town while we—Sevrance and I—endeavored to fathom the unheard-of; and we were scarcely aware of the fact.

Sevrance, I know, maintained his incessant tramp, tramp, tramp, up and down, up and down, without pause or word. I hardly moved, I suppose, for an hour or more.

My head rang with the opening words of that exasperating appeal:

"Gordon, I need you! Gordon, I need you! Gordon, I need you!"

I seemed to hear her sweet tones, as I remembered them; her deep and vibrant contralto with the proud and imperious note that I knew so well, that thrilled me then as it ever had thrilled me, as it never has ceased to move me:

"Gordon, I need you!"

Why? I demanded. What conceivable peril menaced her? What *could* menace Lady Venables-Herbert, widow of Sir Henry Venables-Herbert, K. C. S. I., mistress of Saltacres in Lincolnshire, mistress of millions in her own right, acknowledged queen of her own court in the social world of England—my Heart's Desire? What could even touch her, cause her to appeal to me for aid in a manner so moving and so enigmatic?

It was a futile speculation wherein we two indulged ourselves—I selfishly wrapped up in the sense of my desolation, holding myself robbed of the woman who had plighted her troth to another; Sevrance, unselfishly, as always—

that true man!—since he himself loved her not one whit less reverently than I, and thrice as nobly and hopelessly as either Von Holzborn or myself!

At length the black hours lightened, as black hours must, however despairful they may seem.

Sevrance paused, and, without troubling to summon Grady, lighted the lamps. Startled from my abstraction by the sputter of the matches and the growing glow of the illumination, I looked up, to find him considering me with gravely sympathetic eyes.

"Well?" I said, fancying that I saw an air of hope in his manner. "You think——?"

"I think?" He laughed derisively. "*I* think? Faith, Traill, I'm beyond thinking! I am for action!"

"Action?" I rose, already enlivened by the thought. "How? What do you propose?"

He permitted his hands to fall limply by his sides. "There are a dozen things that we might do," said he, slowly.

"For instance——?"

"We might take a cab and make a little tour of inspection, aiming to discover if, surely, Lady Herbert has left London so suddenly and unceremoniously."

Very likely I stared at him as if he had offered to relieve me of my watch and chain, so astounding did I find this proposition, at once so simple, feasible and sensible.

"Let us go, then!" I agreed, catching up the hat and overcoat which I had thrown upon the divan upon entering, and which Grady had somehow overlooked.

I started for the door, impetuously. But, halfway, I paused, irresolute, noticing that Sevrance betrayed none of my suddenly awakened animation and enthusiasm.

"But—where——?" I faltered, beginning to conceive of the difficulties. "And—to what purpose? Her letter—surely that is enough—she says——"

"In itself it might be proof of the very reverse," he said, absent-mindedly.

"How?" I persisted, blankly.

"Why," he explained, "suppose yourself in Lady Herbert's position. She finds herself about to leave town unexpectedly. She summons a messenger and tells her maid that she will have a note ready for delivery in a few moments. She begins to write, gets half through her note of apology, when something happens to make her alter her determination. Slowly — thoughtfully, doubtless—she tears the first note up, meditating another, and, abstractedly, puts the scraps into the envelope already addressed. She is called away for a moment. The maid, finding the sealed and addressed envelope, gives it to the messenger — and so it gets to you."

"But——" I stammered, appalled by the simplicity of this explanation. A breath of hope seemed to invigorate me. After all, this gloomy edifice of mystery and misery which I had so laboriously erected on an insufficient foundation of misunderstanding, might crumple into nothingness, under the analysis of common sense, like the unsubstantial fabric of a dream at the first ray of light.

"Why, you're right!" I conceded, hopefully.

But Sevrance shook his head. "No—I am wrong," he said, dully.

"What——?"

"I had forgotten, entirely, her first words: 'Gordon, I need you.' She would not have so written without cause. Whatever her motive, at least we can be sure that it existed at the time. She needed your arm—*your* arm, you beggar, not Von Holzborn's—to support and shield her in time of tribulation—and whether or no that time has passed. who can say?"

"At least we can try to discover. You proposed to go out—I don't know whither——"

"I do," said Sevrance, decidedly. "If Lady Herbert is in town this day, or has left it, we'll discover—— Grady, my hat!"

"Yis, yer honor!"

The valet's response came from the adjoining room, dulled by the intervening door. A moment later he opened it briskly, and was about to come in when

shrill and clear, there sounded the imperative clamor of a bell.

"Th' tillyfun——" I heard Grady begin.

But I pushed him aside and dashed into the further apartment, toward the telephone instrument which adorned one wall. I know not by what mental process, but it seemed as if I was made intuitively aware that some fresh development in this coil of mystery was at hand. The bell had not time to cease its whirring vibration, the sound of it was still loud in the air, when I lifted the receiver from the hook and put it to my ear.

Instinctively I was aware that Sevrance had followed me, treading on tiptoe, the better to avoid disturbing me. He was close by my shoulder when the reply to my first—I fear hoarse and discordant—"hello!" sounded along the wire.

The words, when they came, were entirely negative in value and dashing to my hopes—a chill request from central, I suppose, for Sevrance's phone number. I gave it, trembling with impatience, and was told to wait a minute.

A tremulous humming rang in my ears during a wait that seemed interminably long. I stood almost breathless, divided between hope and a fear that this message, which my imagination, overexcited, had magnified into an imminent event of importance, should turn out to be nothing at all more than a commonplace communication from one of Sevrance's wide circle of acquaintances..

Abruptly I seemed to be aware of a whisper—a stage whisper, if I may so describe it—a hushed and guarded repetition of my name, carrying with it an effect of intense strain:

"Mr. Traill? Mr. Traill?"

"Yes—yes!" I well-nigh shouted.

"Ah——" The exclamation seemed hardly more than a sigh, a faint and sensitive sigh, as of relief.

A silence followed, wherein I fancied I caught a sound as of hurried but subdued breathing—a soft and distant sibilance which might reasonably enough have been charged to the singing of the wires.

My mind seemed to attempt an exploration of the unknown and indeterminate distances of that wire, as though my mental vision were feebly and tentatively projected along that slender line of communication, out through the blacknesses of the night, seeking the light at the further station, whence came the call. I waited in an agony, muttering over and over again, almost inaudibly: "Well? Well? Well?"

Finally there came one hushed word, electrifying: "Gordon!" and I was half staggered by the recognition of that voice whose appeal, "Gordon, I need you!" had seemed so clearly audible to me during the past two hours.

"Yes?" I cried. "Yes? Go on—Julia, Julia!"

Suddenly there was a change. I seemed to see the woman, the dear lady of my heart's desire, straighten herself up and nerve herself for a subtle and perilous ruse. Her words came clearly, with a cool and business-like intonation.

I harkened without daring to reply.

"Hello! hello! This is Roguet et Cie.? This is Lady Herbert—Lady Venables-Herbert. I wish to speak, at once, with Monsieur Roguet. Yes? At the phone, you say? Very well. Monsieur Roguet, I cannot come to be fitted to-morrow. I am leaving London, suddenly, and shall not return for several weeks, probably——"

There was a pause. I found no words; I seemed dumb with astonishment, my tongue clinging to the roof of my mouth. She resumed the one-sided conversation as though she had been listening with approval to some response.

"Yes, precisely—for several weeks. Therefore you will finish up the gowns without further fittings and send them to me at Saltacres as early as convenient. That is all. Yes, at once, if possible. Yes, the black-jet gown first of all. Good-day, monsieur, good-day."

There followed a sharp click, and then silence profound and impenetrable. I put my fingers to the bell—and hesi-

tated. My intent had been to ring furiously, to demand an instant reconnection with the other station. But a second's reflection convinced me that such a course had been perilous. I was just becoming convinced of what I had suspected—that the message to the man dressmaker, "Monsieur Roguet," was a mere feint, a mask to Julia's purpose to inform me of her future whereabouts.

And so I did not ring; but, for some reason, while I stood weighing these considerations, I clung to that receiver as a drowning man clings to a straw. I know not what I expected, but, somehow, I felt that the end of the little passage was not yet; instinctively I was waiting for some further word.

For several seconds the silence was maintained unbroken, and then, without warning, there came a prolonged buzzing of the magnets, and a woman's voice, hard and touched with the Cockney accent:

"Are yer through?"

That was central speaking, beyond doubt. I refrained from replying, and was rewarded. Immediately there came another *brrrrr*—one could almost see the impatience of him who rang—and, as distinctly as though I stood by the man's elbow, I heard Von Holzborn's crisp, heavy tones.

"Who is that?" he demanded, brusquely. "What do you want?"

But central had apparently considered the connection still in force, and had turned to other business. At any rate, she did not speak, and you may be sure that I was careful not to break the silence.

I heard Von Holzborn swear, beneath his breath, in German, and then he repeated his inquiry, this time in a tone tinged with unmistakable impatience and irritation.

"Who is there, I say? Why do not you answer?"

I did not inform him. Evidently he concluded to give it up as an unprofitable proceeding. The other receiver went into the hook with a crash, and I, satisfied and convinced that it was the end, turned away and faced Sevrance.

His impatience was manifest, and I endeavored to allay it with a concise account of what had passed back and forth upon that wire. He followed me with strained interest, his eye at first clouding, then lightening, as he conceived the acuteness of Lady Herbert's stratagem. When I had concluded, he threw back his head with a short, brisk laugh.

"Clever!" he commended. "Clever, you beggar! Who but she would have thought of it! Oh, I can see it all—all as plainly as though I had been there: Lady Herbert at the telephone, mad with anxiety to get word to you, fearful every instant of Von Holzborn's return. For he would have been out, somewhere, would he not?"

I nodded.

"And then, just as she musters up courage to speak, he comes back, finds her at the instrument, and she has the cleverness, the ingenuity, the very audacity, to pretend that she is telephoning her tailor! Man——"

He paused. His face lengthened, his eyes becoming again shadowed. And I comprehended the cause. "Clever," he murmured, abstractedly, "clever!"

"Clever—I grant you," said I. "But what does it mean, Sevrance? Why should she be forced to such subterfuge? What right has Von Holzborn, her fiancé though he be, to dictate whether or no she shall inform me of her destination?"

Sevrance shook his head, his eyes on the floor.

"Where were they," I demanded, hotly, "that she dared not use the phone without fear of interruption? Where were they? In London?"

"They must have been—or near it," he muttered.

"But we were told to-day that Lady Herbert had left town?"

Sevrance elevated his shoulders hopelessly. "We were told!" he commented, bitterly. "We have been *told* everything. Traill——" He paused, eying me, I saw, without knowing where he looked. "Traill, there's the devil to pay somewhere."

"I know that—and his name is——"

"Von Holzborn."

"It would give me great gratification to settle his account," I affirmed. "God! I'd give my right hand to know the ins and outs of this infernal nightmare business!"

By way of reply, Sevrance turned abruptly to the telephone, ringing up. I stood wondering, but only to discover that he was attempting to get from the central the number with which we had recently been connected. His efforts, however, were fruitless, although he resorted to every imaginable expedient to gain his end.

After about fifteen minutes of it he gave it up in disgust.

"It's no go," he conceded; "a beastly nuisance!"

The thing was preying on his mind as it was upon mine; what had seemed insignificant three hours before now loomed before us with all the aspect of some monstrous infamy. He took a turn up and down the room, coming to a halt before me.

"At least we know where to look for her—from her own lips—Saltacres."

"The Herbert estate?" I questioned. "In Lincolnshire?"

He nodded. "That is much, Gordon. If she needs you there, she needs me. We'll go, won't we, old chap—together?"

I clasped his hand, but he broke away, calling to Grady, for his hat.

"What now?" I asked.

"I'm off," he said, breathless, with an inspiration.

"Where to?"

"God knows," he said, simply. "I'm going to scour this town for Lady Herbert, for Von Holzborn, for De Netze. If I find her, if it's true that she is still in town—all well and good. But if I find them only—either one of them——"

He paused, his handsome features overcast with an ugly, threatening look. We had passed on into the outer room; I quietly took up my own hat and coat. Grady was assisting Sevrance with his own.

"No, you don't," countermanded Sevrance, noting my action.

"I'm going with you," I asserted, firmly.

"What for, Gordon?" he expostulated. "Don't be a bally ass, old chap. There won't be any—any trouble, you know. Let me alone—let me play a lone hand just now. I think—I'm very sure I can find out something if you will only bide quiet here."

"Not by a long sight——"

"There may come another message," he suggested.

The possibility made me falter in my determination to accompany him and keep him out of trouble; I knew Sevrance's quick temper, carefully concealed though it lay beneath his affection of British *insouciance,* and it was not without reason that I feared an outbreak should he succeed in his search and come upon either Prussian or Russian—far fetched as seemed the consideration of either contingency.

He saw his advantage and improved upon it.

"You had best stay," said he. "If she should wire you for aid at once——"

"I'll stay," I informed him, "upon one understanding; you are to keep your temper and"—I glanced at my watch; it was near seven—"be back by ten at the latest."

"I agree," he said; and we shook hands upon it. In another moment he was gone, taking the staircase three and four steps at a time, if the noise of his descent counts for anything.

And at once I began to regret my irresolution, my weakness. I saw clearly that I should have persisted, that I should have gone with him at all hazards.

There were before me three mortal hours of solitude, which I must endure with patience, lashed though I was by the most maddening of thoughts, picturing to myself, as I must inevitably, a thousand situations, each more improbable than its predecessor, in which my Heart's Desire might be helpless, imperiled, needing the protection of the man who would lay down his life for her!

The prospect was unbearable. I took

to Sevrance's habit of pacing the floor, and found that it stimulated my overwrought imagination to far-reaching and fantastic flights which were proportionately unendurable.

I sat myself resolutely at the table and took to a consideration of the known facts, endeavoring to marshal them into something like a coherent array, but they proved few and intangible enough.

At one moment it seemed that I was torturing myself without reason, at another that I should become insane were not an immediate outlet afforded my pent and raging desire for action.

Abruptly a mode of relief suggested itself. One fact bulked clear and obvious above all others—that we were shortly to undertake a journey to Lincolnshire, barring an inconceivable righting of affairs. I rose at once and summoned Grady, instructing him to go immediately and discover on what railroad lay the nearest station to Saltacres, and to procure a first-class compartment on the earliest convenient train for both his master and myself.

Alone, I set madly to work, stuffing a few necessary articles of clothing in our suit cases. I dare say I made a sad, thoughtless mess of the job—bungled it atrociously. I know that when Grady returned he promptly and very solemnly dumped everything out of both cases and repacked them according to his own conception of the fitness of things.

But long ere that occurred, I was to suffer an interruption that put a prompt period to this manifestation of my energies. In the midst of it all, when I had about accomplished a complete and satisfactory dismantling of Sevrance's bedroom and had the entire contents not only of my trunks but of his bureau drawers distributed helter-skelter about the floor, my ears, straining for the least significant sound, caught the pounding of heavy feet upon the stairway.

I paused, listening. Could it be Sevrance returning? Or Grady? It seemed that neither had been gone more than fifteen minutes, but my watch showed me that it was eight-thirty. It was possible. I went out into the study, carefully closing the bedroom door behind me—a precaution for which I was afterward grateful.

The footsteps were coming slowly steadily, purposefully up the stairs; I concluded that one of the tenants of the rooms above was coming home; neither my host nor his man would have shown such deliberation.

At the door, however, there was a pause, and then, loudly and as if with intent to indicate an unhurried mood, three sharp raps upon the panels.

I jumped for the knob and flung open the door. Captain Kurd von Holzborn entered, calmly, smiling courteously the while he removed his gloves and glanced quickly about the room.

CHAPTER VII.

THE DECLARATION OF WAR.

He gave me a pleasant good-evening, conducting himself with perfect nonchalance. I stammered out a confused and breathless response, which, however, I managed to cover by slamming the door smartly.

My mind was a whirl of conflicting thoughts as I turned, but out of them one consideration stood prominent; I must conduct myself with a coolness and a composure in no degree inferior to Von Holzborn's.

Whatever his purpose with me, whatever the motive which had inspired this visit, which only omniscience could have foreseen and provided against, I must not show the least evidence of my amazement; therein alone was the weak spot in my armor, and, somehow, I felt that this meeting was to be of the nature of a duel between us—a duel of wits.

Certainly Von Holzborn had not come unprompted by some ulterior motive; it was not conceivable that this was a merely friendly call. He had his point to make, his surmise to prove; that was beyond doubt.

It remained for me to keep him as completely in the dark, concerning what he wished to know, as lay within my power—and I prided myself that my

mind would be found as nimble as the Prussian's.

At the same time I was to find out for myself and for Sevrance what manner of devilment Von Holzborn was engaged upon, and how it was affecting the woman whom I loved. I had need of all my diplomacy and discretion for an undertaking so essentially delicate—to worm from this man the truth and let him guess nothing of our suspicions, of our plans or of our knowledge.

He had put himself in the middle of the room, where he stood squarely, as was his wont, with his back to the light, his face shadowed—a temporary advantage. But I managed to meet his hard and expressionless eyes with a gaze as frank and open, although colored with polite surprise, as I could have wished; or so I believe.

At any rate, he seemed satisfied, and, knowing that the advantage of the light was untenable, he relinquished it without any maneuverings, and dropped his heavy, solid carcass into an armchair with a sigh of relief—as a weary man might sigh.

In this position the glare of lamplight was full upon his face; another's had been an open book to a reader of physiognomies; Von Holzborn's was as blank as a freshly laundered sheet, if not of the same hue. To cover my lack of calmness and to keep my face turned from him, I busied myself about the room, finding cigars and cigarettes, during his opening remarks.

"Mr. Sevrance?" he inquired, blandly. "He is not in?"

"No," I told him; "I am alone."

"But he will return——"

I saw no reason for withholding the truth.

"As a matter of fact," I replied, "I don't know when he will get home. He didn't say—to me, at least. And Grady is also out."

"I am sorry," said he. "I would have liked a word with him. We have been quite friendly—Mr. Sevrance and myself, Mr. Traill."

"So he has indicated. A cigar? Or a cigarette?" I offered the boxes.

He accepted a Havana, refusing an immediate light, however.

"After all," he said, watching me keenly, "it is, possibly, as well. My errand, to be candid, is more with you that with Mr. Sevrance."

"Yes?"

I had trimmed the end of a cigar, and now I bent over the lamp, lighting the tobacco with the heat from the chimney; so *mein herr* did not learn much from my expression. An instant later, when I was seated facing him, I had the smoke for a mask, and was well content.

"Yes," he said, precisely, speaking with deliberation and choosing his words. "I am so fortunate as to be the bearer of a message to you, sir."

He bent forward, linking his fingers, his elbows resting upon the arms of the chair, a slight smile softening the hard contour of his lips.

"From a lady," he added, slowly.

"I can imagine from whom, then," I laughed easily. "You see, so far as I know, we have but one feminine acquaintance in common."

"To be sure," he assented, gravely. "We are both favored of fortune, then."

"Decidedly," I agreed, "and yet you deserve the congratulations, Captain von Holzborn."

"And not Lady Herbert?" He laughed shortly, but not unamiably, to show that he had purposely misinterpreted my remark, and continued: "And so, in my capacity as the betrothed of Lady Herbert, you will, I conclude, be agreeable to receive me as her envoy extraordinary and minister plenipotentiary?"

"I am sure that Lady Herbert could not have chosen a more accomplished diplomatist for the purpose," I said, with a laugh.

He had the grace not to show his annoyance. Indeed, he bowed slightly, by way of thanks for that double-edged compliment.

"I am, then, instructed to approach you with an apology," he went on, maintaining his air of courteous banter. "Lady Herbert has tried twice to-day to get into communication with you, but——"

His eyes were like a basilisk's—pitiless; I believe I endured their searching scrutiny unmoved.

"Indeed?" said I, politely.

"Both by letter and by telephone," he affirmed.

"Why, that is odd!" I parried.

"You received the note, of course?"

"The note?" I stared him full in the eye, shaking my head. "Unless," I qualified, "a note may have come in my absence and Grady have forgotten. I must ask him."

"The telephone, then?"

"At what hour?"

He named, with passable exactness, the time when Lady Herbert had telephoned "Monsieur Roguet."

"We were all at home at that hour," I said; "but I am sure that the bell did not ring."

This was, of course, a full-winged lie; but I consoled myself with the thought that I was unlikely to be detected in it. It would be a difficult thing to prove positively that the telephone had been in use that day.

"There was some trouble," Von Holzborn lied, in his turn. "Central did not seem to be able to get the number. But, of course, I might have known that, since, had you received the message, my errand would be superfluous."

He dropped the air of gentle raillery and became quite serious, eying me with a calculating glance. I returned the look inquiringly, and held silence until he spoke.

"Mr. Traill," he said, after a short pause, "I am going to repose a confidence in you. May I ask that you let it go no further than Mr. Sevrance?"

I showed evidences of being startled.

"Is it necessary?" I protested. "Is it serious?"

"A matter of life and death," he stated, gravely.

I was certainly astonished.

"If you consider it safe, necessary—why, I shall not violate your confidence, sir; that is, I must warn you, unless it affects the interests of my friends."

"It does, but in the other way; and, since you stumbled upon a part of the business, Mr. Traill, you may as well know the rest of it."

"I am all attention; you refer to Monsieur de Netze?"

"Exactly." He lighted the cigar with care.

"I may inform you that we are great friends, De Netze and I," he continued. "And, although I am a servant of the German Empire, sir, I feel it my duty to be of what assistance I may, as a stanch friend, to Monsieur de Netze. It is true that he serves another country, but——"

"I comprehend."

"Now, his life is in danger—grave danger. He was all but assassinated, as you know. He is even now under constant surveillance by the assassins; they may, at any moment, accomplish their design. They are determined, cruel, merciless. Unless he can be conveyed out of England, and to a place wherein he may remain in hiding for a time, he is as good as dead now."

"That," I agreed, with sympathy, *"is* unpleasant."

"I have been put to it to find a way to help him—and I have found it, Mr. Traill. Lady Herbert has a yacht—a steam vessel of speed, I believe—the *Myosotis,* at Portsmouth. She has been kind enough to offer us the use of this yacht. It is ready to go into commission at an instant's notice, and—and we sail to-morrow morning."

He stopped, noting the effect upon me. I am afraid that I seemed unimpressed. Indeed, I did not believe the man, and I failed to divine whither his falsehoods tended.

"Lady Herbert and Mrs. Morchester are already on their way to Portsmouth," he went on. "De Netze and I"—he smiled deprecatingly—"will follow by another route, and, to tell the melodramatic truth, in disguise."

"I can appreciate the advisability," said I, soberly.

"And that," he concluded, with an air of relief, "is why Lady Herbert was unable to receive you at tea this afternoon."

"Oh," I protested, "I should not for

an instant consider myself slighted, under the circumstances. I am not, indeed, of sufficient importance——"

"You underestimate your value as an old friend of my fiancée," he explained; "Lady Herbert—Julia, if I may call her so, to you—is more than anxious to see you, to renew old associations, Mr. Traill. She would not have you consider her wanting in courtesy for a moment."

"I hold myself honored," I said, stiffly. "Seriously, I am distressed to think that you thought it a matter of such importance that you left Monsieur de Netze unguarded even for an instant, to offer me this explanation—which was not at all essential, I assure you. Besides, I shall doubtless have the honor of seeing Lady Herbert herself within a day or two, I presume?"

He possessed an admirable control. I prided myself that I had touched him twice, and smartly, pricked twice through the tissue of falsehood with which he sought to bewilder me. But he had not shown a sign of discomfiture. To the contrary, he was ready with a smile, as he rose, evidently to take his departure.

"My friend is in good hands for the time being," he countered. "And the matter was not to be passed over lightly in our opinion—Julia's and mine." And there he touched me, neatly! "Lady Herbert—I regret to disappoint you—will not return for several weeks. She—accompanies us."

For a moment he had managed to hoodwink me, for a moment to delude me into believing his absurd yarn; and now, when I considered that he was proposing to take a young, beautiful and sensitive woman into such dangers as dog the footsteps of a Russian spy, I shuddered and lost complete control of my temper. I know that I flushed angrily under his superior, German, intensely impertinent stare.

"Lady Herbert," I said, "is, of course, her own mistress, but I confess I cannot comprehend with what motive you expose her to the perils of your undertaking."

He looked me over with a smile of faint, indulgent amusement that set my blood to boiling.

"It is hard, sometimes, to comprehend. Lady Herbert serves as a shield, Mr. Traill. The *Myosotis*, going into commission to convey its owner, will not be an object of suspicion."

"You hide behind a woman's skirts, eh?" The words were out before I knew it. "It is not our custom in America—nor in England, sir!"

He took up his hat and adjusted it carefully, in silence, staring at me with that exasperating and essentially Prussian height of insolence.

"Lady Herbert," he said, at length, with biting emphasis, "is not accountable to you, Mr. Traill, for her actions. Nor, I may venture to suggest, am I."

By an effort I managed to approximate his aplomb.

"Assuredly not—at present," I conceded, steadily; "but you are to understand, Captain von Holzborn, that if one hair of Lady Herbert's head is harmed through this venture of yours, you will be held accountable by and to me."

"On what grounds?" he suggested, mildly.

His words, his manner, should have crushed me; they succeeded only in making me the more angry.

"On grounds of my own assumption, if on no other," I retorted. "We Americans are not disposed to look calmly on and see our women deluded by cowards and adventurers."

The fat was already in the fire; I saw no harm in forcing the issue between this Prussian mercenary and myself. In a more calm moment, perhaps, I should have spoken differently; I can't say, now. But then I was quite ready to show him my hand—that of an open enemy.

He bore the epithets without flinching; not a muscle of his face moved. Only I fancied that his eyes grew yet more impenetrable and opaque; my furious glances seemed to shatter themselves against their impassive hostility.

Very quietly he buttoned his coat about him; not until the operation was concluded did he speak. Then:

"So that is the way you feel about it,

eh?" said he. "Mr. Traill, permit me to assure you that, at another time, when I am not bound to more serious affairs, I shall take great pleasure in forcing you to retract those words. In the meantime——"

"I am at your service whenever you are—disengaged," I said, coldly.

"In the meantime——" he repeated, stooping and taking up his stick. For an instant I fancied that he thought to strike me; it was a large and heavy cane, of tough wood.

Abruptly, however, he clasped it with both hands, about six inches apart, near the middle of its length. Without any apparent exertion he bore upon the stick with either hand.

There was a sharp crack, and it splintered and broke in the center. Von Holzborn dropped the halves to the floor.

"Just so," he said, slowly, "I could break you in two, with my bare hands—just so. You must bear in mind that I am a strong man—and I have no love for you. I should advise you to keep out of my path; it is not to be crossed with impunity—by you."

I laughed in his face. "That trick has been worn threadbare, on the stage and in novels," I told him, amusedly. "Let me show you."

Fortunately I am not undeveloped in a muscular way; I used to hold a record or two, for one thing and another in athletics, before a younger generation wrested those trophies from me.

I picked up the two sticks, put them together, broke them, and offered him the fragments. "Your cane, sir," said I, mock-respectfully. "And a good-evening."

He waited perhaps half a minute, his face livid—the first indication of human emotion I had ever noted in the man; and then he brushed past me and was gone out of the door, tramping heavily down the staircase and across the courtyard.

I hastened to bring a lamp to light his descent; I never could understand why Sevrance, in common with other well-to-do young Englishmen, could bring himself to consent to abide in so ill-kept a hole as Lord's Chambers.

But when Von Holzborn was gone, my mood changed to one more sober. I sat me down and regretted my precipitancy—rubbing my forearms, which were sore with the strain.

It had necessitated more of an effort than I had anticipated; my muscles ached for several succeeding days.

CHAPTER VIII.

SALTACRES.

Sevrance was back, prompt to his word, at ten; Grady had forestalled his return by a couple of hours, more or less, and was then busy—as I have indicated—with the packing of our trunks, in the adjoining room.

Seats had been engaged for the train leaving the King's Cross Station of the Great Northern at about nine the following morning. The journey, altogether, would take up about six hours; I planned to reach Saltsea Regis, a fishing hamlet and the nearest station to the Venables-Herbert estate, about three in the afternoon.

My friend came in with a long face and a downcast bearing; he dropped into a chair and grinned feebly at me, breathing hurriedly.

"I've been in the deuce of a rush," he said; "and all on your account, confound you—to keep you from worrying your infernal head off!"

"You're a good boy," I told him, placidly. "Well, what news?"

He made a gesture expressive of disgust and disappointment.

"I've scoured the town," he complained, "to no purpose—or to little."

"But that little——" I encouraged him, as he paused.

"Nothing to relieve our anxiety," he responded; "though this much is certain: Lady Herbert has left town. Von Holzborn has disappeared since last night; and De Netze is either out of town or in hiding."

"How did you find out about Julia?" I demanded, with freshening interest.

"Asked her solicitor—a young chap

of my acquaintance. He was plainly warned to reticence, but he loosened up enough to let me know that her ladyship was to be gone for an indeterminate period."

"Saltacres?"

"He would not say. But that's not the worst of it!" Sevrance swore with vexation. "I've been making a few pointed inquiries about our friend, the Herr Captain—damn him!" he added, vindictively.

"Go on," I pleaded.

"I dropped in at his clubs, and had a little talk with several people we both know. The result is that I'm convinced the man's dangerous."

"I suspected as much long ago. But proceed."

"He is posted at all his clubs, and is reported to be deucedly hard pressed for money. His paper is plastered all over town and is falling due and going to protest. The scoundrel!" Sevrance's face darkened. "I find that he has even been to the Jews, borrowing on his prospects as the affianced of her ladyship!"

I was unprepared for that, and, with the memory of the fellow's insolence fresh in my mind, I lost some of my self-possession. Sevrance showed astonishment at the vigor of my remarks, and even deprecated.

"Oh, I say, old chap," said he, "it's all very well to be angry with Von Holzborn and to work against him, and all that—but, really——"

To make him comprehend, I had to retail what had just passed between the man and myself. Sevrance listened in silence, tracing a little pattern on the carpet with the ferrule of his stick; when he looked up it was with a set and angry expression.

"That makes it clear enough," he commented, thoughtfully. "The man is showing himself in his true colors—as an adventurer, a *chevalier d'industrie,* pure and simple—or not so pure and simple. This De Netze business, now, I take it, is nothing more than a subterfuge to get Lady Herbert in his power—compromised! The devil!"

"That is right, as far as it goes," said I. "But there's more to it. In the first place, he lies about Portsmouth, the yacht and all that!"

"Do you think so?" Sevrance looked incredulous.

"Oh, obviously. He did not believe that Julia had managed to communicate with us, and he thought to put us off the track. Their destination is Saltacres. I have no doubt that De Netze is with them, and that it is true enough that he is being stalked by nihilists. If it is so, Saltacres, from all accounts, is the very place for him to lie in safe hiding."

"Wild and desolate enough—true," said Sevrance.

"Then it's there we'll find them. Plainly, her ladyship suspects something, otherwise she would not have phoned. She desires, at least, our advice. And *she* would not have misled us, Sevrance."

"True," he agreed, again. "They will be at Saltfields."

"And so will we," I informed him, adding the time of the up train the next morning.

"You've acted wisely," he told me. "Now, I'm to bed. We'll leave details to Grady—he's thoroughly reliable. Shall we take him with us?" he added, after a moment's thinking.

"If you wish."

"He's a good man—brave, loyal, quick witted."

I had no objection to offer, and, Sevrance's suggestion being the wisest, I followed his example and went promptly to bed, considering a good night's rest of more value to us than anything else, just at that stage of the proceedings.

At least it furnished me a clear head and a certain clarity of judgment during the next day; I found time and thought it advisable to review the whole affair from start to that moment, during the railway journey, and, although I came upon nothing new, I began to understand the case much more comprehensively that I had theretofore.

I had time, I say, for the reason that conversation between Sevrance and myself was prevented throughout the greater part of the journey by the pres-

ence of another passenger in our compartment.

Grady had taken a seat in the second or third-class carriages—I never could quite fix in my mind the proper degrees of desirability as to the carriages of the English railway systems; I only know that the only comfortable way is to travel first-class, and even that is by no means as luxurious as it is at home.

This one who made a crowd of what Sevrance and I had fondly but vainly hoped would be "just company," was a little, shriveled person, apparently a man verging upon the sixties. He kept well muffled up, and grumbled to himself throughout the entire journey.

Inasmuch as we had practically nothing else to look at, and could hit upon nothing at all to talk about that we dared mention in the presence of outsiders, I retained a very vivid impression of his odd appearance—of his shaggy, iron-gray brows above a thin, hooked nose; of his sunken mouth with thin lips that were never still; of the gaudy, cheerful comforter which he persisted in wearing tight-knotted about his neck, with the ends hanging down, shawllike, upon his shoulders; of his bedraggled, black spats; and, particularly, of his hands, which were the hands of the very old—thin and delicately pink, and with a certain glossiness of the skin, as if it were devoid of natural moisture, stretched tight as any drumhead over the bony knuckles.

He had small, vivacious, preternaturally bright eyes, I remember, with which he chose to stare at us by the ten-minute stretch, quite unconscious of his rudeness, evidently. And whenever we opened our lips, I remarked that his tremulous, old lips would cease moving, that he would unconsciously bend forward a bit, as if to catch what we were saying.

Naturally, such conduct did not prepossess me in his favor. I catalogued him as an inquisitive and boorish old man, and prepared to dismiss him from my mind when we changed cars at Lincoln, taking a branch line train which should convey us to Saltsea Regis, on the seaboard.

Sevrance, however, was disposed to be as considerate and courteous as most young Britishers are to the aged. I recall that with his own hands he helped the old gentleman out of the carriage, and that he instructed Grady to convey his luggage according to his wishes.

It later appeared that the ancient was bound in the same direction as ourselves; for when our train had drawn in, and we were climbing into an empty compartment, I caught a glimpse of our former fellow traveler negotiating an entrance to another car, further down the train.

He disappeared from view, and that was the last that I saw of him for some time.

Our train bore us, in a leisurely fashion, through a rolling and sunny countryside, still and rapt in the immense peacefulness that seems an integral component of an English Sunday afternoon; for it *was* of a Sunday, by the way.

Sevrance said something presumably instructive about downs, and I received the information without any astonishment; it was all just precisely as I had been given to understand English downs would look, and I was contented to find them so perfectly patterned to my mental image.

They stretched away deliberately, offering nothing startling to the eye; merely a pleasant and homely sort of a country, neatly partitioned off into nice little squares of yellow stubble and green grass and bare, brown earth—much like any one of the illuminated pictures you may see in the children's picture books—the prospect rarely diversified by a patch of woodland, or a blaze of white against the neutral tints, where the flank of a chalk hill lay naked.

That outlook was, for a time, like oil upon the troubled waters of our spirits; it soothed, calmed and quieted our feeling of unrest, even provided us with a tentative sense of incredulity, so impossible did it seem that aught out of the common could happen in a land so staid and respectable.

Through its infinite sobriety our train

snorted and smoked and clattered, with a vast, vain air of importance and an assumption of speed entirely illusionary. In fact, it poked; and it was the middle of the afternoon ere it came to a stop in Saltsea Regis—presumably for the simple reason that it could go no further.

We stepped out into a tepid bath of watery sunshine, beneath a high-arching sky provisionally blue. The tang of salt water was in our nostrils, and a long roll of surf sounded in our ears, while a chilly little breeze made our overcoats comfortable.

Grady bustled about, getting our luggage together and making inquiries about lodgings for the night, and finally marched us off down the village's single street, that wound, in an aimless sort of a fashion, along the top of a low, chalk cliff.

Some distance ahead I caught sight of our old gentleman of the worn spats and the brilliant neckerchief paddling purposefully along in the wake of one of the village men, who was shouldering his Gladstone bag—presumably for beer money.

Two rows of bright and cheerful little fishermen's cottages bordered the cobbled thoroughfare. Now and again we passed a neat, inconspicuous little shop. Children floundered after us or ran alongside, wide-mouthed, staring with bright, wide eyes at the intruders; their parents, the natives, regarded us with a stoical calm. We discovered them a peaceable folk, given to minding their own business by preference.

A walk of some ten minutes brought us to the only inn, "The Rainbow"—appropriate name!—happily situated on the very lip of the cliff, overlooking the broad and troubled expanse of the tempestuous North Sea. The landlord, a taciturn individual, welcomed us without enthusiasm, and provided us with adjoining chambers, containing two small grates about the size, and with the heating capacity, of milk bottles, and incontinently left us to our own devices until supper time.

Grady disposed of our belongings with a rather chastened, I-told-you-so manner; he had disapproved of the expedition from the start-off, I gathered. Sevrance and I stuck our hands in our pockets and inspected the seascape somewhat moodily.

The day was just faltering into twilight, the troubled line of the eastern horizon darkening slowly. Far out, now and again, a single whitecap leaped out of the tossing, slate-colored expanse of waters, and nodded to the declining sun. Against the paling sky gulls wheeled alertly.

Nearer at hand, in a sort of cove inclosed by the low, white, chalk scarps, perhaps two score or half a hundred little fishing vessels tossed sedately, like a flock of misshapen and dingy swans, their bare poles describing odd arcs against a lowering background.

On the few piers rowboats rested bottom up, with a curious air of helplessness, like live things deprived of the power of locomotion; and among them men moved slowly, smoking enormous pipes—gnarled and weather-worn types of fisher folk, awkward upon their land legs, jealous of their speech.

Something in that outlook—rather bleak and dreary as it was—affected both Sevrance and myself with a similar sense of depression.

"Nice place," I commented, sourly, catching his eye.

"I don't agree with you," he said—obviously.

"What do you suppose induced anyone to come down here to live, ever?" I desired to know.

He understood that I was aiming at the deceased Sir Henry Venables-Herbert.

"Family estate," he explained, tersely. "I suppose the old duffer was born and brought up in this atmosphere, and came to call it 'home.' Of one thing I'm certain: Her ladyship never could abide it. As a matter of fact, I don't believe they spent more than a month or two out of the year at Saltacres."

"Do you know the place?" I inquired, curiously.

"I have visited there for the shooting once or twice, and passed it on a motor-car run. The roads hereabouts

are really not so bad, you know; Sir Henry used a motor car always to travel in, back and forth. I wish I'd thought of it—but it's your fault."

"What is?"

"You had to send Grady to buy tickets per rail, and made me forget my motor. We might as well have traveled up here that way as not—much better, in fact—more quickly and comfortably."

"It would be an advantage," I agreed; "I'm heartily sorry that we haven't it now. It reminds me of reaching Saltacres. How are we to go about it?"

"I spoke to the landlord about a fly," said Sevrance. "He'll have one around before long, I imagine. Or—it's only ten miles—we could walk it," he added, brightening.

That's British for you. An Englishman seems to think that a walk is the most desirable thing on earth—the longer, the more so. If he wants to be particularly agreeable to you, he invites you to go off on a twenty-mile tramp with him.

Sevrance was looking at me with characteristic eagerness; I reckon he expected me to snap him up on the instant. But I said: "No, I thank you," so decidedly that he understood I was fixed in my preference for riding, and gave in.

"Suit yourself," he growled, sulkily.

"I'm going to," I responded, with prompt cheerfulness.

He turned to the windows, exhibiting a pair of misunderstood and abused shoulders, and obstinately refused to respond to my timid advances until Grady answered a rap at the door and announced the waiting fly.

For my part, so soon as it was definitely settled that there was no uncalled-for walking in prospect, my spirits began to rise; and I was quite contented as we two ran downstairs impatiently enough, and piled into an age-old and ramshackle contraption termed by courtesy a fly—presumably because it didn't; not by any manner of means.

Sevrance took the reins, but did not start until he had questioned the landlord as to our destination. The directions we got were explicit enough; it seemed that we had nothing to do but give the horse—another courtesy title; he was really a snail—his head and let him follow the northerly road.

My friend had another question or two: Had our host heard anything of Lady Herbert's returning to Saltacres? Had he noticed any automobiles within the preceding twenty-four hours? To both of which the landlord returned negative replies, couched in a broad, Lincolnshire *patois,* which I can't attempt to reproduce.

Meanwhile I remarked that our ancient fellow traveler had concluded to cast his lot with ours at the Rainbow. He stood on the doorstep, sniffing the evening air with a red nose, and pricking up his ears with curiosity, during Sevrance's little talk with mine host.

Particularly I noticed that he darted a quick, queer glance at us when automobiles were mentioned; one would have fancied him struck with a new idea. He caught my eye upon him, bowed politely, and, turning, re-entered the hostelry.

Sevrance gathered up the reins, clucked to the animal in the shafts, and we moved off.

After a few hundred yards I turned in my seat and looked back. Saltsea Regis was vanished—infolded by the hills wherein it drowsed out its placid existence. We had rounded a shoulder of the downs and were descending a gentle slope.

Before us lay a vast and desolate expanse of downs, bathed in the ruddy light of the setting sun, sinister to look upon, oppressing the imagination strangely with its effect of infinite, grim distances; a savage and implacable wilderness.

I settled back in my seat, snuggling beneath the lap robes with a little shiver. Presently we had reached the lower level and could see no more than a hundred yards or so of the winding road before us. Even the sea, its nearness made manifest by the sullen growling that filled the air, lay invisible for the greater part of the way.

Only once or twice we came out upon a hilltop, or drove near the edge of a

low, chalk cliff overlooking the waters; and only once, if I remember distinctly, did the road debouch upon the verge of a long, low and sandy beach, where our wheels sank deep in the yielding sands, following an ill-defined way between wide reaches of shuddering, coarse grasses.

For a couple of hours we traveled on, meeting no one. Night succeeded a lingering twilight, adding to the desolation that surrounded us. Sevrance stopped our beast, got down and lit the lamps, remarking that it seemed more cheerful.

He may have so regarded it; for my part, it but accentuated my sensation of loneliness. I conceived a hatred, then and there, for English downs; a hatred which will stay with me to my dying day, I fancy.

After a while, however, it seemed that we were driving somewhat inland, into a more friendly region. We passed infrequent farmhouses, their position evidenced by glowing windows. Above us the winter stars seemed to increase their cold brilliancy, so that the general configuration of the countryside became more easily discernible.

Sevrance finally broke a wearisome silence.

"We should be near Saltacres," he said. I noticed that the downs had borne upon his spirits as they had upon my own; he spoke in a low and guarded tone, as if he feared a listener—which was something not at all to be apprehended, just then.

"If I remember the lay of the land," he continued, "we will come upon the park before many minutes."

"The park!" I ejaculated. "A park in this God-forsaken locality!"

"It's not so beastly over here," he explained; "it's higher, better ground.

"Saltacres itself is a vast game preserve more than anything else—a protected park, lying between the road and the sea, with the house in the very middle of it. Sir Henry, I know, had his private yacht landing on the sea edge of the grounds."

"But how will you know it?" I insisted.

"Oh," he returned, confidently, "the house stands near enough the road for the lights to be visible through the trees—especially at this season of the year, when there is little or no foliage."

"But supposing there are no lights—supposing they are not there?"

"They're there," he was sure.

"But if they haven't arrived——"

"Now, be sensible, Gordon!" His tone was impatient. "Where else would they be? What would they be doing all this time? We are practically positive they left London yesterday, and they cannot but have arrived before us."

"But if they didn't come——"

"They did. Her ladyship said they would."

That was unanswerable. I could only justify myself feebly by a reference to the statement of the landlord of the Rainbow.

"He *said* that no automobile had been seen for weeks——"

"Naturally they would come by a roundabout way, to escape observation. There's a road across the downs from somewhere near Lincoln, for one; or they might have driven up to Grimsby-All-Saints, in the north, and doubled back here."

It seemed more hopeful, in the light of that explanation. I began to feel more assured of finding my Heart's Desire at this journey's end. Indeed, I was afire with eagerness and impatience when Sevrance finally drew rein.

"The gates are closed," he announced, "but here's the lodge, at any rate. Jump out—there's a light in the window on the other side."

I leaned forward, peering into the dense darkness of the roadside. At the first I saw nothing at all, but gradually, by dint of straining my eyes, I made out the high arch of an old iron gateway, and, blacker against the general darkness, a blurred smudge that might stand for a small lodge building.

Therefore I obeyed Sevrance and jumped out. He followed me, leading the fly and the thing that had drawn it to a hitching post, which, I concluded, he found by instinct. But possibly his

eyesight was more keen than mine, for when I protested that I saw nothing in any way resembling a light, asserting that there was no such thing there, he contradicted me flatly.

"On the further side of the lodge," he indicated. I stepped to one side, and was forced to admit that he was right. A faint, yellow radiance did percolate through one window, falling athwart a stretch of dead grass, and, finally, upon a low shrub that grew near by.

"You're right," I conceded, unwillingly—hating to acknowledge myself mistaken.

Sevrance did not reply. He strode past me and found a door upon which he knuckled a resounding summons. A voice from within made instant answer:

"Well, well, now, I be a-comin'."

And a moment later a line of light showed beneath the lintel and above the threshold. There was the sound of fingers fumbling with the latch within, and then the door was opened, letting out a flood of radiance.

A gaunt and sallow keeper stood framed in the doorway, holding a kerosene lamp high above his head, blinking out into the darkness. The light fell luridly on his gray head with its strongly cast features, upon his shoulders and the huge and bony hand which held the lamp. But below his figure was invisible, shrouded in obscurity. The effect was remarkable—that of a head and shoulders suspended in mid air.

He stood silent for an instant, staring blindly.

"Well?" he mouthed, irritably. "Who be ye and what d'ye want?"

Sevrance moved into the light. "Good-evening, Thompson," he said. "I'm Mr. Sevrance—you remember me?"

"Lor' bless us, yes! Mr. Sevrance, sir—I know ye well enough, indeed, though 'tis many a long day since I have put eyes upon your face, sir. But I remember ye well. What brings ye this way?"

"I wish to see Lady Herbert, Thompson," Sevrance told him, directly, wasting no time in circumlocution. "She told me in London to meet her here, and I came at once. Will you open the gates and permit——"

"Her leddyship, sir?" said the old keeper, incredulously. "Her leddyship be not here, sir. You've been misled."

"Come, come, Thompson," Sevrance remonstrated, in a kindly tone. "Don't beat about the bush. I must see Lady Herbert, and that instantly."

"But she be not at Saltacres, Mr. Sevrance, sir," the fellow protested. "No, sir—no; keep your money. It be the truth I am tellin'. Why should I lie, sir? Well, sir, if ye insist, I will gladly drink your health, but the solemn truth be that Lady Herbert is not at Saltacres."

"Not at Saltacres!"

There was a profound despair in Sevrance's voice; I had not believed, until that instant, that he had placed such faith in his assumption that she would be in Saltacres. I stepped to his side, slipping my arm through his.

"She has been delayed, Tony," I said, loudly. "She will surely arrive tomorrow, will she not, Thompson?"

Shaking his head, the keeper blinked at me.

"I do not know ye, sir," he said, "but ye are with Mr. Sevrance and his friend. So I can tell ye the truth; that if her leddyship be a-comin' to Saltacres, not a soul here knows a word on it."

There was an accent of unmistakable sincerity in his tones; neither of us doubted him an instant longer. Sevrance turned away with a groan.

"By Heaven!" he swore, angrily. "Tricked again—duped by that infernal Prussian!"

Von Holzborn had indeed proved more astute than I had thought him—I, who prided myself on my ability to read character! He had taken us in neatly, and there was nothing for it but to acknowledge ourselves beaten.

"Come, Tony," I said, gently. "We may as well give it up; we've followed a false scent. Let's get back and sleep on it."

"Sleep!" he cried, scornfully. "How can you, with her——"

You may believe that I was as wrathful as he. It maddened me to think with what complacency Von Holzborn must have been laughing in his sleeve at me during the interview of the past night, when I had boldly asserted what he must have known was a downright falsehood—that I had not heard from my Heart's Desire.

"Come," I said, again, controlling my voice with difficulty.

But Sevrance jerked his arm away. "Wait!" he cried.

"For what?" I demanded.

He motioned with his hand, enjoining silence. "What——" I began, and held my tongue, for I saw that he was listening.

Loud upon the stillness of the night, broken as it was only by the dull undertone of the distant surf and the sighing of the breeze in the leafless trees, there rose, and gathered momentarily in volume, a sound as of the hurried breathing of a giant.

The rapid, short, panting noise was unmistakable; it could denote nothing but the approach of a gasoline motor. I confess that my heart leaped as I recognized the sound, confirming, as it seemed to, the accuracy of our reasoning.

Sevrance raised his head. "Was I right?" he demanded, exultantly. "And we are here ahead of them. Now they can't escape us!"

But to what end, I was wondering. For my own part, I was uneasy in my mind when it came to the prospect of confronting mine enemy there, on that lonely stretch of road. At least, I knew enough of him to guess that he would go armed; and not yet had the advisability of a similar course occurred to me.

"Sevrance," I asked, hurriedly—for the motor's strident song was growing louder and clearer as it drew near to us—"are you armed?"

He turned to me, his face livid in the starlight. "Armed?" he iterated. "The devil! No!"

Two round and glaring eyes of flame jumped into sight, scarcely five hundred yards down the Saltsea road; for a moment they seemed to hang, vibrating, suspended in space; and then I observed that they were growing incredibly, with amazing swiftness. Lightning-like gleams of polished brass and steel seemed to play about the car; and the noise of its approach grew deafening.

It swung down upon us in a marvelous burst of speed, flying onward in a smother of fine dust. So high was the pace that I grasped at a fugitive hope that we might be mistaken, after all, that the machine was not going to stop before Saltacres lodge.

But the futility of that hope was soon made manifest. I heard the hoarse, warning honk of the horn, and every bolt and joint of the huge machine seemed to shriek protest as the brakes were applied, bringing it to a total stop within thrice its length—and directly before us.

TO BE CONTINUED.

CAP'N HAM AND THE LIONESS

By Charles Edward Barns

Being the tale of an artful ape and a confiding lioness. Although strange and unusual, the incidents on which this story is based are by no means impossible, as any keeper or trainer of wild animals can testify

JES' wot a moon-faced chimpanzee sees in a seasick lioness to spoon over," said Mate O'Shaunnessy to his sailor comrades over the mess, "w'u'd puzzle St. Pathrick, to say nothin' of a crew of Noah's Ark mat'loes the likes of us here." He speared a potato to the fork-hilt.

" 'Bout time they made Cap'n Ham fast to the port shrouds," suggested a common sailor now and then gifted with uncommon sagacity. "If he should take to wanderin' ashore as soon as we tie up at the Erie Basin docks, two thousand dollars' worth of monkey would soon be convulsin' Brooklyn without the price of admission."

"Which would break old Bartin's heart, eh?" said a voice adown the row.

"No fear of that," said the first mate. "Why, lads, Cap'n Ham w'u'd no more think of leavin' this ship than you w'u'd think of scuttlin' her after these twelve thousand miles of hard weatherin' wid these wild bastes of the upper Congo —partic'ly wid the lioness aboard." He glanced through the starboard porthole, catching the familiar front elevation of Fort Hamilton across the placid waters of the noon-bright bay. "I wonder, now, if old Bartin himself will be at the dock to luk us over?"

"Ar-r! Good and plenty," affirmed the third mate. "That old showman can calc'late the value of the livin' cargo by a glance at the water line. Old Bartin hasn't put thirty thousand dollars into this menagerie stock jes' from philanthropic regard for the Senegambians to rid their jungles of all forms of four-footed, crawling or flyin' torture, from the stowaway scorpions in the hold to the giant hippos on the 'Grumblers' Deck.' He's in it for the bank roll. Hello! What's got into the 'Grumblers' ' quarters now?"

There was a combined roar above decks. The new occasion for lamentation among the wild beasts lined up in cages there was the lassoing of Cap'n Ham. Hitherto this mammoth chimpanzee had enjoyed the freedom of the ship, and in many a weary calm and battling storm had played sole jester to this court of jungle nations, as well as edified an indulgent crew. Cap'n Ham, some years before, had been found in the jungle of mid-Africa by a good missionary, who took the infant simian to his bungalow and brought him up as a good chimpanzee ought to be. The Cap'n had profited mightily thereby. Indeed, had he been a reincarnation of the original Ham, he could not have proved a worthier object of admiration and amused surprise.

The missionary died, and so great was the Cap'n's grief that he was for burying himself alive beside his late master in token thereof, when a showman's "runner" happened along. They unearthed Cap'n Ham and carried him hence by force, little by little assuaging his sorrows with kindness, till he was a gentleman to reckon with.

But now that freedom which he had enjoyed aboard ship had been outraged,

and he resented it. Just because the vessel was gliding up the Narrows and was soon to anchor within the pale of civilization, that the Cap'n should be lassoed and lashed to a capstan was more than five feet of monkeydom could stand. Moreover, a diet of nuts and strict habits of sobriety had given the Cap'n the strength of a six-footer and twice his agility.

When his old friend, O'Shaunnessy, first mate, came on deck after tiffin, the chimpanzee was looking most pained and dejected, particularly as he had been humiliated right in front of the cage of the noble Congo lioness, Lady Ayesha, for whom the Cap'n had formed a wonderful attachment—a sentiment evidently reciprocated. In fact, the incongruous flirtation was the ship's one romance.

"I say, Cap'n, it's a bloomin' shame, that's wot it is," said the Hibernina, approaching, putting his arms around the captive commiseratingly. "An' roight here before your ladylove, too!" he added. "Ar-r! they're jilous, that's wot, Cap'n, they're jilous. But l'ave it to me. I'll see that no harm comes to you, mind thot, now!" And quieting the injured one, Mate O'Shaunnessy passed down the deck, whistling for joy at his home-coming.

But Cap'n Ham, perceiving that there was much ado on arriving at port, probably argued that to depend upon others for his liberation was vain. He had not watched sailors tie and untie rope knots these many moons for nothing, so he brought his wits to bear, together with two hands, two feet and a versatile caudal appendage. The good ship finally lay alongside the Erie Basin dock, and the work of unloading the noisy freight was begun.

The Cap'n paid little attention till the cages from the "Grumblers' Deck" were being unlashed and rolled aft. That interested him, for he saw that it was only a question of a short time when Lady Ayesha, in her rude castle, would be wheeled over to the derrick and lowered into nameless oblivion, as had been the rest, and he should be left forlornly alone. But there was a hitch in the proceedings, and the moment of parting did not occur till after the sun went down and the great, white moon arose over the wonder city, the straining, oath-prodigal animal men working by lantern light. When finally Lady Ayesha's cage was rolled by, that beautiful beast thrust her paw between the bars, and the chimpanzee touched it lightly as it passed, uttering pitiful lamentations, while her ladyship groaned her farewells despairingly. The derrick chains were wound round the cage, the steam mule snorted, the cage slipped over the side of the vessel, then was heard a mighty splash!

Of course the Cap'n had no means of knowing what had happened, but he saw a little, red-headed German beating his breast and rending the night with unseemly sounds, while his friend, Mate O'Shaunnessy, was gesticulating wildly and trying to tell how it occurred. With great difficulty the cage was fished out of the black rift between the vessel and the dock; but, lo and behold! the door had been burst open in the fall, and Lady Ayesha was gone!

Of course Cap'n Ham had no means of knowing that, either, but he thought it about time for his own disappearance. In despair at parting from his fellow captive, who had not disguised her strange attachment for a mere chimpanzee, the Cap'n worked at his bonds till within an hour he was as free a monkey as ever wandered the Congo wilds. Now, knowing that to show himself to the crew in his liberated state meant recapture, the Cap'n seized a dangling rope and went hand over hand upward to the mainmast yardarm, and there sat down, unseen, to rest.

The vessel was a large one, so that when she lay docked her fore and main yards extended to within a few feet of the roofs of the low warehouses that hemmed the river's edge. Along this arm the Cap'n wandered shoreward, then hopped down upon the warehouse roof and started aimlessly along the dense shadows. At last he brought up flat against the rear of a seven-story tenement.

Animal instinct prompts these creatures to go through barriers, over them or under them, but never around them, if it can be avoided. The Cap'n glanced up over the bleak intricacy of fire escapes, then made a spring and clutched one, starting skyward toward the first open window.

Into this he climbed carefully, finding himself in what proved to be a lodging-house bedroom. A feeble light burned above him, and, by its faint gloom, he descried garments flung over the back of a chair. The coat was of blue, with brass buttons, and a jaunty cap bore the figure "7" over the peak.

There were snorings from the single cot at his right, but the Cap'n paid no attention to them. He was vaguely recalling an army officer who once visited the missionary on the Congo, and who awoke one morning to find Cap'n Ham parading the compound in his regimentals. The memory of his pride at that moment clung so strongly that the Cap'n now reached for the cap and set it upon his head, glanced at the broken mirror and approved of himself so far as to proceed with the rest of the attire.

He was just buttoning the coat about him when the man in the bed awoke and sat bolt upright, his hair on end, his bulbous face colorless.

"God!" he moaned, piteously. "I know I'm a deserter, but if you'll take that thing away, I'll go back to the fort, give meself up and never drink another drop!"

Then he floundered down and lost himself in the bedclothes. But the Cap'n gave no heed. Proud of his attire, even though his coat tails did touch the ground as he walked, he opened the door and passed into the dim hallway and thence down the stairs, flight after flight, to the street.

The wide avenue at first quite staggered Cap'n Ham, but soon fascinated him. A glittering fruitstand stood at the curbstone, the custodian nodding sleepily. The Cap'n could not resist an onslaught. He filled one packet with bananas, another with hot chestnuts, and was preparing a third by emptying it of its contents, which included a cigar. This was his delight, so he thrust it into his teeth and went on to dried dates just as the swarthy Italian woke up.

"Here, youah! Whata you do? Heyah!" He ignored the majesty of the uniform so far as to lay a rude hand upon the offender, but when the Cap'n calmly uplifted an eloquent countenance, the Dago drew back with a shriek, as if he had accidentally laid hands on a live wire. The Cap'n only grunted protest, in the flickering gasjet lighted his cigar, and promenaded down the avenue, leaving trails of cheap tobacco smoke behind him.

The streets were quite deserted, but a few passers-by saw the queer figure, thinking it probably a museum freak out for an airing. A man crossed the Cap'n's path, and at the trackside hailed a passing car with uplifted hand. This amazed and interested the chimpanzee —to see such a brilliant, big chariot stop stock-still and take aboard a stranger; and, imitation being strong within him, when another car bore down, the Cap'n moved to the trackside and raised his arm imperiously.

The motorman obeyed from force of habit, and the Cap'n stepped aboard, passed in and took a rear seat as the other had done.

"Hey, you sojer, no smokin'!" called out the conductor, as he advanced. Then the Cap'n looked up, and the conductor seized a strap as his heart stopped beating. "By all the saints!" he cried out, and hurried to the forward end of the empty car and rapped on the window for the motorman, pointing to the creature in the corner seat. "Dennis, d' you see it, too?"

"Don't I, though?" answered the motorman. "An' I see that we are twinty minutes to the bad, and no more stops for passengers till we get to the bridge, see?" He slammed the door as the conductor, with a sigh of relief that it was not all a fiction of his brain, moved back toward his strange passenger.

"Who air y'?" he demanded. "Where'd you come from, y' brown divvil, you?"

The Cap'n answered by offering the

conductor a stolen banana as he deposited the smoking cigar butt between his toes.

"Baytin' yer freight wid a penny banana, and smoking me into a two-dollar fine besides, eh? Just you wait till I get you to the bridge, I'll turn you over to the polace, y' soldierin' haythin!"

The car flew into the more brilliantly lighted quarter, but not so fast that one or two agile platform jumpers could not leap aboard, who, of course, began to get busy with the strangest passenger that road ever carried. The conductor's embarrassment increased, and he heaved a sigh when at last, at the bridge entrance, he spied a familiar figure in padded uniform.

"Hey, there, Casey!" he called out. "Come aboard, quick! I've got the very old Adam himsilf fer a free ride. Come, look, fer Hiven's sake!" Then, as the portly cop swung aboard, he pointed out the stranger. "Now, what d' you think of thot, eh? Wouldn't that jar y'?"

"Where'd you get it?" said the nightstick twirler, scratching his head.

"I didn't. It got me," said the conductor. Then added, after a pause: "Say, Casey, thim Barge Office people will let annything through nowadays, won't they?"

"Dunno," admitted Casey, "but the glorious airmy of the raypublic must be hard up for recruits when they enlist the loikes o' that, sure enough." He did not proceed further with his facetious comment, for just then something happened. Cap'n Ham had caught sight of that nightstick.

Now, the Cap'n had had experience with sticks of various lengths and thickness ere this, and had learned that the best way to avoid their stings was to seize upon them at once, break them in two and throw the splinters as far as possible. In the twinkling of an eye the Cap'n was up and busy, and Casey was minus his nightstick.

The chimpanzee tried the stick over his knee, and, failing, gave it a tremendous whirl from the rear platform over the bridge rail, into the night. Then, evidently convinced that they were no friends of his, seeing those steel strands soaring upward into the sky world, with the agility of a trained sailor he leaped from the slow-moving car, seized one of the upright cables, shot upward to the great, supporting strand of the big bridge high above, and sat down there to continue his supper of luscious, hot chestnuts.

"I say, Casey," said the conductor, perspiring but relieved, "there's a bit av the Irish about that regimentalin' monkey, eh?"

"Let me aff!" snapped Casey, in the rage of the vanquished. "I'm goin' to call out the fire department." And he tucked the broken leather thong in his pocket as he hurried away.

But the complications of Cap'n Ham were nothing to those of the German showman and the first mate of the *Killania,* who showed up in the inner sanctum of Brooklyn's chief of police early the following morning, bulging-eyed and full of many apprehensions, having demanded to be seen at once, principally for the good of Brooklyn. The chief gave them three minutes to state their case.

"I'm Bartin—Hans Bartin," said the showman, faltering, plainly perturbed.

"Oh, the menagerie man. Very well. To the point, please," snapped the chief.

"I vant you to make a search for me——"

"Man or woman? Names, circumstances—everything! Be brief!"

"'Tain't needer mon nor vomans, chief. It's—it's a she lion."

"Wha-at!" exclaimed the man in the fleckless uniform. "You mean to tell me that there's a lion loose in the city of Brooklyn—now, at this minute?"

"I—I don't know vedder it is loose *in* Brooklyn, or *over* Brooklyn, or *under* Brooklyn; but it is somev'ere *around* Brooklyn, I can svear to that."

"Go on! The facts!" demanded the chief, looking worried.

"Vell, y' see, chief, it's dis vay," stammered Bartin. "No, you tell 'im, O'Shaunnessy. You saw the cage go down."

"To the divvil I'd stayed back in the Congo region, raythe r!" said the Hi-

bernian, advancing. "Annyway, chief, I'm the first mate of the *Killania,* jus' in from Africa wid a shipload of wild animals for the zoos and the travelin' shows this comin' season. We're unloadin' at Erie Basin. Well, last night, by lantern light, we rolled the cage of Lady Ayesha, the big lioness, to the starboard rail, ran the derrick chains about it, gave the word to haul up, swing over and lower away over the dock. Between the ship and the dock was a space jus' wide enough to let that cage slip through, and ding me if, wid the lion's poundin' around inside, the thing didn't slip from her chains and go plump into the drink, cage, beast and all." He made a gesture to give the recital emphasis.

"What about that?" said the chief. "A dead lion, eh?"

"So we thought, chief. But listen! It was low tide. We let a man down wid tackle, and soon hauled the cage up. Blarst me if the cage door weren't burst open and the bloomin' beast nowhere."

"Well, good riddance is all I can say. What do you want of me?" said the chief.

"Good riddance, never a bit!" said O'Shaunnessy. "That sleek divvil niver stayed down there long. She's ashore somewhere right now, and don't you forget it."

The chief scratched his chin, then rang for his adjutant. "Sergeant," he said, "what was that complaint over the phone from Gowanus Creek district just now?"

"From Peterson's stock yards. Some sort of wild man or beast got into the sheds last night and killed four calves."

"Sounds very loike the worruk of Lady Ayesha," gasped the first mate to his superior, who looked deeply perturbed. "She always was partial to venison."

"See here," said the chief, after long thought. "You say it was low tide?"

"It was for that rayson that we hurried the work by lantern light, sir."

"And the sewers emptying into the bay at Erie Basin were partially exposed, so that your she lion, coming to the surface after the drop, makes for this only hole in the wall, and escapes into it, wanders on two miles, and comes out on high ground near Gowanus Creek, smells blood and goes on the forage. It's perfectly plain."

"And my two t'ousand dollars' vorth of she lion is now down in der Brooklyn sewers? *Gott!* I'm a ruined man." The showman suddenly lost his nerve.

"As there are about two hundred odd miles through which she can run at large down there, coming out occasionally to kill something, you've got your hands full."

The sergeant now advanced. "The Russian Jews are in a panic up Brownsville way, chief," he said. "They've heard roarings up through the manholes all night, and the poor, superstitious fools think it's the warnings of the devil, and are in terror of some calamity befalling them."

"As if it hadn't already!" sighed O'Shaunnessy. "Chief, I've fit the sleek divvils in their lairs in the upper Congo regions, an' loike a Roman gladiator on shipboard in a nasty sea; but hang me ef I iver fought a lion in a sewer, and hang me over ag'in if I know how to go about it now."

"Well, something must be done at once," said the chief, decisively. "Something is bound to happen, and the responsible parties must take the brunt of it."

The Teuton groaned. "Vot a fool not to keep my mouth shut and let dot two t'ousand go," he sighed, under his breath. "Vell, O'Shaunnessy," he added, aloud, "it vas you who tied her loose, and it's you to dose sewers with a dark lantern and a pickax!"

"Divvil it is!" protested the first mate. "It's you to your bank roll; give me fifty men wid rubber boots and lassoos——"

"Excuse me, gentlemen," broke in the chief. "This is my busy hour."

"Pardon, chief," interrupted the sergeant. "Your gorilla is outside."

"My what?" demanded the functionary in gold braid, half rising.

"That gorilla in army togs captured

on the top of Brooklyn Bridge this morning."

"Oh, I had quite forgotten," said the superior, now facing his visitors. "Perhaps," he said, with some sarcasm, "you can explain the presence of a big, brown gorilla in military clothes bobbing all over the big bridge cables all night."

The Teuton and the Hibernian turned on each other their search lights. "That's somethin' I didn't tell y'," confessed the first mate at last. "Ye see, I didn't want to hit yer wid too many troubles at onct. But while we were workin' for that she lion, the big chimpanzee untied himsilf from the capstan and tuk shore leave."

"Vot! Cap'n Ham—gone, too? *Himmel!* I vas double ruined!" The German collapsed.

"Bring him in, sergeant," said the chief. "Let's see what he looks like."

And so into their astounded midst was dragged the most shamefaced, humiliated and outraged denizen of the Congo jungles that ever aped a white man's faults, his army cap awry, his coat roped around him with arms crossed to serve as a sort of straight jacket, and following him a much-battered policeman. The chief tried to look stern, but that hopeless, helpless picture of monkeydom in distress was irresistible. He simply hid his face and shook.

Suddenly there was a wild, strange cry, and the chimpanzee had leaped into the arms of the first mate, struggling vainly at the ropes and uttering queer, chuttering sounds, at once pitiful and convulsing. The recognition was mutual.

"L'ave him to me, gintlemen," said the Hibernian, calming the trembling refugee with a familiar caress. "I'll be raysponsible for him, never fear!" And with the knots untied, the poor beast clasped his long arms about the first mate, crying plaintively, his eyes eloquent of joy, his big, brown body quivering as he laid his head close into the brawny, bull neck of the friend restored, like a lost child.

"Wot have they been doin' to you, Cap'n, old man?" the first mate said, caressingly. "Been abusin' you? Bloomin' shame, so it is! And where did y' git thim togs, y' rascal? 'Listed in the airmy so soon? Company B, Siventh Artillery.'"

"Ah, those are that deserter's clothes, stolen down at the shore lodging house last night, I fairly believe," said the chief, with a significant sniff.

"Wot! Cap'n Ham a deserter from the ship and a thafe, too?" said O'Shaunnessy. "Thot's wot you get for runnin' after the ladies, Cap'n. Oh, I have it, chief!" he exclaimed, as if suddenly enlightened. "This 'ere chimpanzee and his swateheart, Lady Ayesha, wot escaped into the sewers, sir, are old fri'nds. She would not let a human being come annywhere near her except to make meat of 'im, but Cap'n Ham, he can make her quiet as a lamb. L'ave it to the Cap'n and me, chief. Don't be afraid—y' needn't look so skeered. He won't get loose. W'y, you couldn't drag him from me now wid an anchor chain. L'ave it to me, an' I'll have that lioness out of the sewers within twinty-four hours, or I'll go to jail. Fear nothin', chief. The Cap'n and I'll fix it all."

"Well, see that you do," said the chief, sternly. "If you don't, and that chimpanzee gets loose again, I'll lock you up. As for the lioness in the sewers, the quicker you get her out and caged, the surer you stave off certain ruin, understand?"

"Himmel!" groaned Bartin, who had faced and vanquished many a situation in his varied career, but never one like this. Thankful not to be himself arrested, he followed his first mate from the august presence and out of the building, where a curious throng met them, and spread-head extras ran thus:

NOAH'S ARK BREAKS LOOSE.

The *Killania*, from Africa, Disgorges Unwelcome Show Features.

LION HOLDS FORT IN SEWERS.

Big Gorilla in Army Togs on Bridge Cables.

CITY IN STATE OF TERROR.

Naturally the City of Churches was dumfounded. The newness of the situation gave a thrill. That unarmed and innocent people were walking abroad over a lion's den was as if a volcano, whose menacing rumblings were heard ever and anon, had been discovered below, and none knew when and where the outbreak would occur.

"But kape a stiff upper lip, me Dutch fri'nd," encouraged O'Shaunnessy, overfamiliarly. "Me an' Cap'n Ham will make you roight shortly, niver fear." He was meditating upon a stratagem as they pressed through the gathering mob.

"Unless something happens first!" sighed Bartin, apprehensively. "But there's von consolation; dis ad. is vorth fife t'ousand dollars—if only dot she deffil don't eat any more calves nor kill somebody."

They hurried on through the stress.

"Say, Bartin, at twinty-five cints a head fer this crowd, and more to come, you could afford to let Lady Ayesha eat a calf a day for thirty days and build houses wid wot's left. Here, we'll take a cab. We can't stand this. Hey, cabby, how much to Erie Basin docks? Tin dollars? Done! In wid you, friend Bartin!"

"Vot extravagances!" sighed the showman, glad, still, to avoid the mob which seemed to spring from everywhere at once, hanging out of windows and fire escapes, hooting from the tail rails of passing trolley cars and raining down from nowhere.

"Hold on, there!" cried a voice behind them. "Them's me togs, sergeant, and that's the nightmare wot came into my room last night and stole 'em. Hey, there!"

O'Shaunnessy turned and faced the hatless, coatless deserter in the custody of his superiors. "How much do two of thim regimintals cost?" he demanded.

"What's that to do with it?" responded the other, hotly. "I lost me clothes and I'm disgraced. Phoned all over the city, and only just now the chief of police——"

"Will twinty do the thrick?" interrupted the first mate, peeling off a bank note from a roll of some dimensions. "Will, eh? Now, be off wid ye!" Cabby drove on.

The morning extras had done their deadly work. Around the "Noah's Ark," at the docks, there was such a press of people that it required four policemen to keep them in good grace. Human nature was so strong that instead of keeping as far away from danger as possible, all were prone to see how near they might approach and yet escape sudden death.

"An' all dose peoples have all dot fun for nodding!" wailed the Teuton, toward the gathering mob.

"But think of the ad. you're gettin', man!" encouraged his first mate. "Now, me hearty, one word of caution. I want six men—I'll pick 'em mesilf—and jes' let me alone for a time. Say nothin' but that I'm actin' under orders, see?"

"'Zactly," said the showman. "But how you goin' to get Lady Ayesha, eh?"

"Niver moind how; just bel'ave me when I tell you that she'll be back in her cage by daybreak to-morrow, as I promised the chief, or I'll go to jail for it. Ten hours is all I ask, sir," said the animal hunter, confidently.

"You can haf ten days, for all of me, if the beast don't kill somepody in der meantime. More as that, I'll gif you one t'ousand dollars for her, dead or alive."

"Done!" The Irishman spat on his palm, and offered the hairy hand to the Teuton, who shook it half-heartedly. "Well, here we are! Come, Cap'n Ham. You an' I will go out an' find the Lady by moonlight to-night, loike rale lovers. Come."

The trio hurried back to the decks of the *Killania;* the chimpanzee was lashed once more to the capstan, which captivity, remembering his late vicissitudes, he accepted with more grace. Down the decks O'Shaunnessy encountered the third mate, full of questions.

"Ask me nothin'," said the strategist. "No, we've not locayted the she divvil yit, but we're goin' to, right now, Dugan. Where's Sleepy Bess?"

"Aft, by the galleys, in the further cage. Why?" said the third mate.

"A whole lot why. Go below and git me one of thim pit nets we used for trappin' Congo tigers. Mind, not a word to annybody. There's a conspiracy on—hist! It means a hundred to you, Dugan—sh-h-h! Be off!" The first mate then hurried aft.

Sleepy Bess, the biggest lioness, save Lady Ayesha, that ever reached these shores alive, was sleeping more soundly than ever. She was that gentle and indifferent that any one of the crew could enter her cage, rub her sleek coat and play with her as with an old puss, the beast never resenting any familiarity. O'Shaunnessy took a bottle from his pocket, stole into the cage, rolled the beast over, pried open her massive jaws and poured down a dark colored liquor. Bess grunted and slept again.

In capturing African tigers, the natives dig, in the very heart of the jungle, a pit ten feet deep, about the same in diameter at the bottom and about six at the top. Over this they construct a weak, reed floor and carpet it with green. On this they bind a young kid or some raw beef. Mr. Tiger will not walk up and take his meal in a gentlemanly manner. He springs upon it from a distance of fifteen feet, or thereabouts, and, of course, goes plunging down through the light floor to the bottom of the pit. There he rages and storms, trying to leap out, but only dragging the weak earth down upon him. Then the natives lower a net, in which the tiger instantly entangles himself and becomes helpless. He is drawn up, caged and the pit net cut loose. What O'Shaunnessy, the strategist, and Dugan, his faithful, did with Sleepy Bess and the pit net will be apparent later.

Till four o'clock of that eventful day none knew the whereabouts of the first and third mates, and Bartin, who asked many questions, was told that they had left the ship with their helpers, all armed, with rubber boots and coats, coils of rope and sundry implements. He stopped down the deck and commiserated with Cap'n Ham.

"I don't see where you come in in dis rescuing party, after all," he said to the chimpanzee, who looked slighted. "I guess dot Irishman he make a fool of you and dot police chief, too. Vell, Cap'n, we shall soon see."

And see they did, sooner than they expected. The sun was declining when a sailor thrust an afternoon edition in Bartin's hands. It greeted him in brilliant scare heads:

LIONESS LOCATED AT LAST.

Trapped in Sewer Near Park Entrance.

WILL BE CAPTURED TO-NIGHT.

General Terror Allayed. Armed Men on Watch.

"Vot! so soon?" cried the showman, in great glee. "Dot man is a vonder."

"Great excitement," exclaimed the sailor. "Mate O'Shaunnessy wants you at the park entrance at once, together with Cap'n Ham, sir."

"Vot? Fetch dot chimpanzee, too?"

"Yes. Don't know what for. It's all in the game. 'Actin' under orders,' he says."

"So he is, and so must I," said the showman. "If dot man wants anybody or anyding on dis ship, it's his. Come, Cap'n! Ve're off for Gott knows where."

The big chimpanzee, who meanwhile had shed his regimentals, arose to the occasion and suffered himself to be led away by the able seaman, Bartin following, much mystified.

"Don't see vot O'Shaunnessy wants with dot monkey, hang me if I do," he kept muttering. "But it's for some good reason, so here goes!" And showman, sailor and chimpanzee entered the shabby vehicle which had been in commission all that day.

The sun was setting as they drove up the broad avenue leading to picturesque Prospect Park. A vast human tide was now pouring in that direction to see the strangest lion hunt on record, for the afternoon "Extras" had done their deadly work. Bartin looked and wondered.

"Oh, for a box office!" he moaned, as he eyed the throngs on foot and awheel, all excitement, as if hurrying to a Roman gladiatorial contest. And how did they know but that was just what they would witness; some innocent Christian torn to shreds in the jaws of an infuriate lioness? The thought drove them toward the point of danger rather than away from it, for such is the inveteracy of the old Adam in the semi-savage heart of us betimes. The carriage drove up to the very center of the crowded Plaza, a most sightly spot, indeed.

Around an open manhole, from which there protruded a number of ropes, with a strong man to each, stood a cordon of police to keep back the eager throngs. Not only was the immense open space already jammed with curious crowds, but hundreds clung to the high points of vantage—trees, house tops, balconies, windows—and in the very vortex was the chief of police, in very earnest converse with First Mate O'Shaunnessy, who was leaning back against a heavy dray whereon stood the empty cage.

"Me man," the mate was pleading, "I've captured woild bastes in the Congo region half me life widout a scratch, and it's simplicity itsilf. These men you see here are holdin' the four corners of a big pit net let down into the manhole to the bottom of the sewer. The baste is somewhere below, slaypin' off his feast. These other men yonder, armed with blank-cartridge pistols and tin horns, enter the sewer a block away and begin movin' toward us on hands an' knees, drivin' the crittur ahead of them. When he gets here, as he surely will, bang! into the net he plumps, and it's all over wid 'im. Up he comes and into thot cage. Is it plain, chief?" Then as he saw the man in uniform back away, yielding, but far from convinced, the leader cried: "All riddy, boys! You two to the lower manhole wid your torches and tin horns, and you two to the upper. Into the sewer wid ye, and crawl toward us here, wakin' the dead all the way. Be off!"

The trained men started away without a murmur, the crowd parting to admit them. It was the supreme moment.

Old Bartin looked abroad over that quivering mass and even forgot the sad lack of a box office. He began to tremble for consequences in case of a stampede.

It seemed a very long time, but, in fact, was but a few minutes at most when above the awful hush was heard the bellowing horns and the crack! crack! crack! of the pistols reverberating up through the open ports from the underworld, and the strategist, O'Shaunnessy, dropped on his knees beside the manhole, making signs to those behind him to maintain silence.

The chief moved apart, scowling and not a little apprehensive, his hand upon his revolver in the concealment of his pocket. He was going to take no chances, and if there was to be a killing, it was a chance for a hero.

"I hear 'er, lads! She's comin' this way!" cried the Hibernian, excitedly. "Stiddy, now! Hark!" There was no doubt of it. A long, low, snarling and rageful roar echoed up from below, and the crowd shuddered, holding their breath, some making for shelter with wild eyes and blanched countenances. "She's 'ere, boys! Stand by! We'll have 'er in a minute! Stand still w'ere you are, everybody!" he yelled, confidently. "Now, lads!"

A mighty tug at the four ropes simultaneously proved the truth of the prediction. "There she is! She's caught, she's caught!" the master of these strange ceremonies yelled loudly enough to be heard many blocks. "Up, now! Stiddy, boys!"

With roarings that fairly shook the earth, the lioness in the pit nets was hauled slowly upward, and at last a dripping, straining monster, safely enmeshed, was dragged from the manhole, and a shout went up.

The sight of the beast whipped the crowd into greater fury, and a stampede to shelter began, men shouting and women screaming, till the chief upraised his hand with a pacifying sign as he began to breathe again when he saw the rageful beast safely thrust by skill-

ful hands into the big cage and the door slammed to.

Then four dripping men with torches and tin horns crawled up out of the sewer, and another shout went up. Men crowded about them and tried to shake their grimy hands, slapping them proudly on the back and losing themselves in sudden hero worship, while the poor, bedraggled beast, once the strands of the net were cut, arose on all fours and greeted the mob with a terrific roar of welcome that was the signal for a mighty ovation.

The chief approached the Hibernian and extended his hand. "That's the nerviest thing I've seen done in my time, Mr. O'Shaunnessy," he said, with no feigned enthusiasm. "If I only had a few lion tamers like you on my force, I'd be showing the people something."

"You flatter me, chief. For me, trappin' lions; for you, bank robbers. It's all the same. Ho, what's this?" He turned to the German showman, whose face was a perfect blaze of pride and delight, but who was trembling now from head to foot, as if he had gone through a death shock and survived it by miracle.

A stranger touched him from behind. "Are you Bartin, the animal man?" he asked.

"I am," said the showman, proudly.

"Well, I'm Gringo, proprietor of the Gringo Dime Museum, down near City Hall, you know. I want that lioness for a feature—salary, hundred dollars a day for a month. Does it go?"

Bartin was fairly taken off his feet. The first mate broke in. "Nixy! Thot baste is goin' out to Ohio on the midnoight train. She's already booked."

"But I want her here. Look at this crowd—the advertising—whew!"

"Well, there's one way to get her, and only one—buy her."

"How much?"

"Five thousand, cash on the spot."

"Done, by Jupiter! I've three thousand cash with me here, and I'll draw two thousand in a check. The chief here will tell you it's good as gold."

"Good for a hundred thousand," said the man in uniform.

"She's yours," said O'Shaunnessy, before Bartin had time to open his mouth to speak.

The museum man paid over the money, drew the check, covered the cage over with some shreds of old sail in the dray, then rushed to the phone, ordering an immense display sign to sweep across the front of his huge building setting forth that this was "the savage, African, man-eating lioness, trapped from the sewers of Brooklyn in the presence of a hundred thousand people, and bought at an expense of twenty thousand dollars, etc., etc."

Then the cage on wheels started toward City Hall, followed by a concourse that seemed still fascinated by the roarings.

Bartin drew the first mate toward the carriage as he said: "But why for you order Cap'n Ham here? Vot does dot confounded monkey do with it all?"

"Hush, aisy, now, me Dutch fri'nd," said O'Shaunnessy. "First of all, wot's me rake off on this deal? Then I'll tell you wot I want wid Cap'n Ham."

The showman drove into his pocket. "How's two t'ousand?" he said, generously.

"Good and plinty," exclaimed the first mate. He took the bills, and they shook hands. "Now, thin, as to Cap'n Ham." He grew confidential. "First av all, I'll out and tell you right now, the she lion you jes' sold to the dime museum man isn't Lady Ayesha at all."

The Teuton's jaw dropped. "Vot? Den v'ere is she—in der sewers yet?"

"You've guessed it. Thot's Sleepy Bess. We let 'er down there unseen by anybody to-day when the place was deserted. Now, don't lose your nerve. You're three thousand to the good for a baste worth six hundred at most, and I'm well paid fer me stratagem. I did it to put the payple off the track, so as we could work alone in secret to-night. Now, to the rale trouble!" He watched that look of wonder as to whether or not the trouble previously were in any wise unreal. "Ye see, the city was in an uproar. I had twinty-four hours in which to produce a lioness from the sewers or go to jail. I produced the

goods. Very well. Now, they'll go to the museum and pay a quarter to make sure it's the baste, then go home and slape the slape of peace, instead of roamin' the streets and spoilin' my stratagem. When all is still, me and me men an' Cap'n Ham yonder will get busy."

"But if the chief gets wind of it, he will lock us all up——"

"But he won't get wind of it."

"And der newspapers—and Gringo?"

"Confound the newspapers! As fer Gringo, you've got his money, and he'll get it back foivefold. Do you know what I discovered to-day? I discovered the rale whereabouts of Lady Ayesha."

"T'ank Gott!" groaned Bartin. "Dot's somethin' encouraging."

"Now,. there's one thing about a lioness; when she has made a haul, twenty-four hours after, to the minute, she comes back to her quarry. She'll be back at the Peterson stock yards at the same hour and minute as last night."

"And eat up some more calves? *Himmel!*"

"Never fear. We'll have 'er before she gets that far. Now, that lioness has but one fri'nd she would not tear to pieces on sight. It is Cap'n Ham, here. Moreover, there's only one thing a lioness fears. It's mice. Yis, sir, laugh as you will, a lioness who will attack a bull hippo or a wild elephant will beller murder and take to the brush at soight of a mouse. It's the woman of it. Come; no toime to lose. We'll drive out to Gowanus Creek and look the ground over."

As if urged forward by a superior power, the German lumbered into the vehicle.

It was shortly after midnight that six men met at the mouth of the big sewer which empties into Gowanus Creek near the Peterson stock yards. They had come from different directions, each man knowing his business, and hence there was no parleying. One man carried a bundle of rubber boots, another torches, a third, being O'Shaunnessy himself, bore Cap'n Ham on his back, and another carried three of the ship's cages filled with live mice.

"You, Dugan, drop into the sewer three blocks to the westward, where I showed you. You, Dunfies, to the opposite one; and you, Finnigan, to the third, so that she can't escape us. Let out your mice in a rush, and start 'em scamperin' in this direction. That will wake 'er up, and on she'll come. Here she'll find Cap'n Ham and me wid the ropes. Off wid ye, boys! Don't kill unless you're yoursilf gettin' kilt. All ready, lads. Come, Cap'n; this is our busy night, this is. Mr. Bartin, will you pl'ase kape watch wid this loaded revolver? If the Lady slips by me, don't hesitate—shoot. Easy, lads. Three blasts of the horn, Dugan, when you're ready. Off wid ye!"

The little company separated, and went about their several tasks. O'Shaunnessy began loosening two coils of tarred rope, the ends of which were securely fastened to an iron collar capable of instant adjustment to the neck of any refractory wild animal. Then, with the chimpanzee before him, urged on not without the latter's hard protests against entering so forbidding a dungeon, the first mate began the advance on all fours, dragging the ropes after him and uncoiling them as he went.

Many times the poor ape shrank back into the Irishman's arms, affrighted at the darkness, and had to be soothed and petted into a condition of calm, and urged gently forward again. At last was heard the blast of the horn reverberating through the devious underground ways afar, and the watcher knew that the stampede was on. Almost simultaneously there was heard the low, frightened growl of an animal in terror, approaching nearer and nearer as it rose to a prolonged shriek, and the first mate clutched his revolver tighter.

Then at last was seen the greenish glare of the monster's eyes glowing out of the solid darkness. She was moving toward them at a pace which showed that she had sniffed her unwelcome guests afar. Suddenly she paused and made a strange sound of surprise, as if deeply mystified in her terror.

The chimpanzee, strange to relate, now quite lost his fright. At the realization that it was Lady Ayesha whom he had encountered in this strangest of places, he gave a sound of delighted greeting at once pathetic and ludicrous.

Then he moved forward and renewed his devotions before that adorable shrine, and the lioness sank down, ceasing her ugly snarlings, and taking the homage of her long-lost jungle fellow with satisfaction as if they were really of one kind.

So far so good, thought O'Shaunnessy. Now came the difficult part.

Advancing slowly, revolver in hand, the iron collar in readiness, the first mate bent forward, guided only by the light in the ferocious creature's eyes. Had the chimpanzee not been between them, she would have made short work of her would-be captor, but the chimpanzee's presence served to soothe her savage discontent with her horrid surroundings and gave her apprehender somewhat the advantage.

Slyly, stealthily, the daring Irishman reached forward over the very shoulders of Cap'n Ham, slipping the iron collar about her neck and locking it fast ere she was aware. Then even more cautiously than he had advanced, O'Shaunnessy began the retreat, all the time covering those green-fire eyes with his weapon, till at last he reached the mouth of the tunnel and fell with a little cry of triumph upon the slimy stones in the moonlight, panting and thankful.

"No more sewer hunts fer me," he murmured to the showman, who stood over him, plying him with questions. "We've got 'er, thank Heaven, but I w'u'd not go back there ag'in fer a thousand times her price. Quick! make that rope fast yonder. The mice will be after her in another minute. Now, for the pit nets! Call thot man to drive close wid the cage. Ho, 'ere she comes!"

A battalion of frightened mice had reached the more frightened lioness. She gave a terrific roar, ignoring her friend, the chimpanzee, entirely and coming on like an angry whirlwind. O'Shaunnesssy seized one rope and made it fast, spreading the nets in such a way that the lioness fell headlong into it, floundering about in its meshes till completely imprisoned.

"Ho, lads! The cage, the cage!" commanded the strategist. "We must get her in and away from here at onct or there'll be the very divvil to pay. Be quick, men! Ho, 'ere's the Cap'n."

And, indeed, the Cap'n it was, emerging from the horrible place with a woebegone look, somewhat battered and very unsightly, indeed, but for all that the big Irishman took him to his bosom.

"Well done!" exclaimed the first mate, gratefully. "But for you, Cap'n, I'd be on the inside o' that sleek baste by this time, or else we w'u'd have lost the foinest specimen of a Congo maneater that iver slipped by the immigration bureau. Well, Mr. Showman," he said, triumphantly, addressing the proud Teuton, who had watched this miracle with increasing wonder and delight, "wot about it?"

"I t'ink it's vorth another t'ousand, mate," he answered, drawing forth his big wallet, "and here it is." A sigh of relief came up from the bottom of his soul.

"You do me proud," said O'Shaunnessy, seizing the proffered reward. "To-morrow all hands have a feast—on me. Come; let's get up and out of this before the chief of police, old Gringo and the newspapers get after us, or it'll go hard."

"The next time von of my vild animals get tied loose in New York," mused Bartin, bitterly, "I'll know better than to call in the bolice department."

"Thot's right," chimed in O'Shaunnessy. "It's embarrassin'. It's a mighty soight better to let 'em roam at large and compromise wid the heirs and next of kin. Come, Cap'n."

Only Lady Ayesha looked worn and disconsolate, weary of the world. To one simple jungle habit she had sacrificed her freedom and a nightly banquet of *kosher* veal, and her eyes rolled unspeakable reproach toward the arch-Judas of the hour, the much-ruffled but indispensable Cap'n Ham.

Norroy, Diplomatic Agent

By George Bronson-Howard

Author of "The Ruling of the Fourth Estate," Etc.

A YANKEE KNIGHT ERRANT

This is the fifth of a series of complete stories dealing with the adventures of "Yorke Norroy," secret agent for the Department of State. In this story Mr. Bronson-Howard describes how the wily Norroy undertakes rather a perilous mission in the far east, meets with a fair degree of success, and then throws the fruits of his victory away. There is a woman in the case, of course.

(*A Complete Story*)

CHAPTER I.

THE "SOLDIERS OF FORTUNE."

Here, there, devil-may-care, where my sword may lead, I'll follow,
Honor's crown awaits the brave, fortune mocks the timid knave.
Biff! Bang! let the steel clang, words without the deeds are hollow.
Sword in hand, at love's command, I'll do or die!

HOLFORNESS had picked up a copy of this song somewhere, and so constantly had he sung it since that time that his fellows had gradually learned it, adopting it for their slogan. There were five men who sang the ditty, three Americans and two Englishmen, and they sat in the taproom of the Salambo, Port Arthur's hostelry most beloved by the Anglo-Saxon.

Gerald Holforness was certainly not sober, neither were his companions, else they would not have continued to sing, seeing that it much displeased the other occupants of the café. To tell truth, Russian vodka was not a fit drink for Mr. Holforness and his *confrères.* Their beverage should have been beer.

The sixth man at the table was a nondescript, when it came to a matter of determining his nationality. The closely clipped Vandyke beard which he wore and the curling mustache might have inclined one to the belief that he was a Frenchman. But somehow this impression did not last when his indefinitely colored eyes were turned on the spectator. He was slender, almost boyish, in the lines of his figure, but his shoulders were square and aggressive. Beneath the hair on his face, the thin lips and firm jaw showed a spirit which was almost bulldoggish, yet his slim, daintily manicured, almost womanish fingers, and high-arched instep within high-heeled tan riding boots seemed marvelously out of the drawing.

He was attired in a uniform of khaki serge, cut after the latest London fashion plates for his majesty's service, and the Norfolk belt encircled a waist so slim that a woman might have envied it. In one hand he carried a riding crop of ebony, trimmed with silver, with which he occasionally flicked small

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The preceding stories of this series, "How Norroy Created a New Republic," "A Tilt With the Muscovite," "The Isle of St. Anthony," and "The Eagle's Eyrie," were published in the April, May, June, and July issues, which can be obtained through any newsdealer. Price, ten cents each.

particles of dust from his baggy breeches.

"Oh! I say," he broke in, when Holforness had chanted the song for the fourth time. "Oh! I say, old chap, cut that blooming noise, will you?"

Holforness turned on him indignantly. "Inten' t'sing shong musher please," he retorted, with drunken dignity. "I'm Gerald Holfornesh, soldier'fortune, Missher Warrendell. I'm soldier'fortune. Whash say?"

"I say you're a howling ass," retorted the man called Warrendell, rising. "A howling ass, and you make entirely too much noise. Soldier of fortune—pooh!"

"Missher Warrendell," continued Holforness, retaining his balance by a nice calculation of equilibrium. "Very goodsh; you're Britishersh like m'self, else you couldn't shaysh things to me. I'm soldier'fortune, Missher Warrendell, an' I fightsh man f'r less'n that."

Maddison, the American correspondent, raised his glass with an unsteady hand. "Here's to England!" he shouted. "Here's to England!"

Holforness seized his own glass. "Here's to United Shates, old fellowsh. Heresh to England, United Shates and —Japan!"

"Well, of all the bloody fools!" commented Warrendell.

The Russian officers who were drinking near by rose to their feet and cast threatening glances at the bold group that dared mouth their enemy's name within the very portals of Russian domination. Although it was not yet war time, the feeling was bitter, as might have been expected.

Warrendell moved toward them, and spoke in French. "They are drunk, *messieurs,*" he explained, courteously.

"An excess of wine often betokens the true state of mind," returned the lieutenant of artillery whom he addressed. "But it is as you say, they are drunk. Otherwise I myself would hold them to account. Will you not drink with us, M. Warrendell?"

Warrendell refused politely. "I have taken too much already," he said. "My compatriots are not wise men in the matter of vodka. And, besides, I must have a clear head for my journey to-morrow."

"You are leaving us?" queried a major of infantry.

"I go to Chefoo by the *Loongsang* at three o'clock to-morrow morning. She sails with the tide. I must be aboard her ere midnight."

He shook hands with them, and went out, walking down the Pushkin Ulitze toward the Bund. He was perfectly well aware of the fact that the Russians knew beforehand that he was leaving the Manchurian fortress that day; else he would not have told them. Previous experience with the secret service of the czar had taught him that but little was concealed from the imperial Russian police.

He was glad that his month's stay in Port Arthur was coming to an end. It had been very distasteful to him, used as he was to trickiness, deception and treachery. But before he had been working for his own country. Now he was laboring in the cause of the little brown men whom he disliked—disliked extremely. He was almost sorry that his plans had been consummated.

To those who knew Yorke Norroy to be a diplomatic agent, little surprise would have been expressed if this apparently dyed-in-the-wool Britisher with the Georgian accent, monocle and Piccadilly clothes would have disclosed his true identity. For Cecil Warrendell was only another of the many aliases, and the get-up a new disguise, used for the purpose of cloaking the real man from the too curious public.

Norroy was a man of few scruples when engaged in his chosen work; but up to this time he had not served any country other than his own. Had he been engaged in the same work which now occupied him for the state department of his native land, he would have felt no compunction whatever in doing exactly what had been his chief concern since he had been in Port Arthur. As it was, he felt that he had no excuse.

But, after all, it was the fault of the minister to Japan! What right had he

to reveal Norroy without disguise to the mikado's ministers? None whatever, argued the secret agent.

Briefly, it had all come about in this manner: Norroy had just carried through a diplomatic deal in Korea which had resulted in the benefit of the United States and, incidentally, Japan. Through it all, the minister had known him as Robert Evans, and the said Evans had looked no more like Yorke Norroy than did Cecil Warrendell. After the thing had been over, Mr. Robert Evans had been requested to hold a consultation with Marquis Ito.

There were many Poles in Port Arthur, Poles of noble birth, and principally officers of the army and marine. Ito wanted a man who could arrange with these men to obtain a set of plans and figures relative to the fortifications, armament, food supply, mines and other things concerning the Manchurian fortress. Vague hints had been brought to Ito's ears that these Poles were anxious to see the downfall of Port Arthur, and would, in return for grants and privileges in the future, aid the Japanese in every way to compass the possession of the city by the men of Nippon.

Mr. Robert Evans spoke Russian, Polish and Chinese, incidentally French. There were few men who could pass muster in such an array of languages, even among the best linguists of the Japanese secret service. But for a Jap to chaffer with these men would be impossible, for every Yamato who entered any Manchurian town was watched as keenly as though the safety of Russia depended upon it.

Therefore, Mr. Robert Evans, of the United States Department of State. He was a friend to Japan; his country its ally. He was clever and spoke many languages. Marquis Ito offered him a large sum.

Had Yorke Norroy not been guilty of reckless extravagance the season before, he would have refused the offer curtly. As it was, he was heavily in debt and needed the sum mentioned. He wired Washington for two months' leave. When the request was granted, he told the marquis that he would undertake to do what Japan wished. He was paid a certain amount for current expenses, and, on his returning successful, the rather large sum of one hundred thousand yen was to become his.

So Mr. Cecil Warrendell suddenly appeared in Chefoo one day, and later in Port Arthur. Mr. Warrendell was an explorer and a traveler. He was writing a book about the fortresses of the world. So foppish, so utterly inane, had he seemed to be that his presence had been almost unnoticed by the Russian police—at first.

Sewed into the lining of the secret agent's coat were certain papers for which the Russians would have killed regiments rather than the man who carried them should step from Russian territory. Yorke Norroy knew this, and, although by quitting Port Arthur so soon he was forced to leave certain details unattended to, he was of the opinion that what he had amply justified him. Therefore, he had had taken passage on the *Loongsang* that day, and the next morning, before daybreak, would find him in the Gulf of Pe-chihli, the vessel's nose turned toward the China promontory.

But the more Norroy thought over the subject, the more his own actions disgusted him. It was true that he had never liked Russians, but, since his stay in Port Arthur, he had come into contact with so many that had impressed him favorably that his sentiments were gradually undergoing a change. At least the Russians were white men!

Another reason for his self-recriminations lay in the fact of his knowing full well what Japanese victory meant to Asia. For ten years Norroy had been making trips to China on diplomatic missions, and he had seen the influence of Nippon upon the Celestials. Once the Chinese army had been officered with Europeans. Now nearly all of them had been dismissed and Japanese officers put in their places. China was taking Japan for a model. What if China should shake off her lethargy?

The "Yellow Peril" was no hallucination of a disordered imagination with the cool, alert secret agent. He knew

China's vast dormant strength; knew the energy, the patience, the skill of the four hundred million subjects of the Throne-of-a-Thousand-Heavens. If they ever took up arms in earnest, the white man's supremacy would be no more.

After a brisk walk around the Bund, Norroy went to his hotel. It was growing dusk, and the harbor lights were twinkling from all descriptions of vessels in the inclosed harbor, from the trading junks to the huge men-of-war. He saw the *Loongsang* moored to the Butterfield Swire wharf, and, taking out his watch, noted that it was six o'clock. He had still six more hours of Port Arthur.

He entered his hotel and went to his room. He did not light his lamp, but sat in the darkness, smoking contemplatively and regarding the hurrying *droshkis,* the itinerant Chinese merchants and the Russian soldiers passing beneath his window. Six hours more, and he would be out of this place! And then—Shanghai the Ever-Blessed. He smiled with pleasure as the brilliantly lighted dining room of the Astor House came to his eyes. He heard the town band playing, and saw the well-dressed men and women—Anglo-Saxons, every one of them.

He threw away his cigarette, but did not rise. Although it was past the dinner hour, he did not feel hungry. A distaste for Russian food had taken possession of him.

A slight noise in the uncarpeted hall without made him sit up suddenly. It sounded as though some one were endeavoring to enter his apartment by stealth. Naturally cautious and suspicious by long training, Norroy listened intently. He heard a key being turned in the lock, and remembered that he had his own key in his pocket. He arose, his hand touching the revolver buckled beneath his blouse, and stepped behind a pair of heavy portières which hid his rather scanty wardrobe.

Almost noiselessly the door was opened and the figures of two men showed indistinct in the darkness.

"He cannot be here," growled one, in a low tone.

"Exactly what we would have, little brother," returned the other. "Perhaps he has here papers which we need. Strike a light."

The tiny flickering flame revealed two men in the uniform of the Russian police. The wick of the lamp was ignited.

"He will be here shortly," resumed the first man. "He was last seen at the Salambo, and has not yet been to dinner. So we must see what we can find, and then await him here."

The two men proceeded to break the lock of Norroy's steamer trunk and to throw out, higgledy-piggledy, his articles of attire.

"Do you believe this story, Mikhail Mikhailovitch?" asked the second man. "Is it possible that a prince of Poland could be a traitor!"

"So says the chief," returned Mikhailovitch. "But we may be sure this man carries not the papers away from his person. They will show whether or not our Finnish friend lied."

The question and the answer were enough to tell Norroy that his life was not worth a kopeck in Port Arthur. He remembered the Finn; he had never trusted him.

The men had their backs to him. Norroy took down his dispatch bag from a hook and slung it over his shoulder, then drew his Colt revolver from its holster, and, moving cautiously forward, struck Mikhailovitch a heavy blow on the temple. The man fell without a groan. As the other started up, Norroy swept the lamp to the floor, and, delivering his antagonist a crushing blow beneath the ear, darted to the door, and opened it.

Finding the key in the lock, he turned the lock and pocketed the key. He wasted no time in reflection, but went down the hall at his usual pace, descended to the foyer and out to Navy Street. Two horses stood saddled without. He mounted one with a great appearance of unconcern, and touched it lightly with the quirt, which was attached to the saddle.

As the beast darted off, a man sprang into his path, and a spurt of yellow fire,

followed by the sharp crack of a Luger pistol, made the animal rear on his haunches.

"Stop him! In the czar's name!" came a shout. Norroy brought the quirt heavily over the horse's ears, and, with a great heave, it shot out of the man's reach.

Norroy heard a great shouting behind him as he sped along, and twice a bullet sang past his ear. The hoofs of another horse on the frozen ground behind were plainly audible, and, peering back, he could discern a man galloping after him.

Norroy knew it was useless to make his way toward the *Loongsang* or any other ship in the harbor. He must get out of Port Arthur on the land side—make for Dalny or Talienwan. Once out of the city itself, his progress would be much easier.

Pedestrians and horsemen alike drew out of the way of his thundering horse and that of the man who followed him, screaming out for aid in capturing the spy. Passing Cossacks made springs for his bridle rein, but none succeeded. Many took shots at him, and at one Norroy's horse gave a shrill neigh of pain. Feeling downward, Norroy's bare hand encountered streaming blood on the horse's neck. The animal's pace slackened, and the man behind steadily drew nearer.

They were out of the city now, and were nearing the railway station. If his horse could only hold out until he reached the hills! His pursuer fired, and a bullet whistled through Norroy's felt hat.

Norroy knew that he could do but one thing. His horse was stumbling and could carry him but a few paces further. Suddenly he swerved him from his path, turned him squarely in the Russian's way, and jerked him to a standstill. With his free hand he aimed at the oncoming pursuer, and the shot caught the Russian fairly in the center of the forehead. The man quietly collapsed and tumbled from his horse.

Norroy dismounted and caught the freed horse by the snaffle rein. He swung his foot into the stirrup, touched his new steed lightly with his spur, and galloped off again, leaving the dead Russian and the wounded horse behind.

But it was only an instant's respite, for, over the hill he had left in his wake, he could see a party of horsemen bearing behind him. To outride these men would be impossible. What then to do?

He swept down a second hill, and the Russian railway station loomed large before him, not a half mile away. Perhaps a few dozen rods from the station was the Nikobadze. The landlord of the little inn was an Armenian, and could be bought. The best thing to do was to buy him, and lie concealed there until he had time to disguise himself and buy a passport.

As he neared the Nikobadze, he again dismounted, turned his horse facing the other way and gave it a smart cut with the quirt. The animal sped off in the direction of Port Arthur, and Norroy made all haste in the direction of the little inn.

He threw open the glass-paned door and walked into the Armenian's private room without knocking.

"Georgios," he said, rapidly, and in Greek, as the little bandy-legged man in the greasy black clothes eyed him tremblingly, "I am wanted by the Russian police. If you can hide me here for a couple of days, you can make ten thousand roubles." He thrust his hand into his pocket and pulled out a five-hundred rouble note. "That you can have now—the rest when I leave here safely. If you fail in hiding me, not a penny more. Will you do it, Georgios? Speak quick! The police are coming."

"Yes, *effendi*," returned the Armenian, his eyes dilating at the sight of the money. "I have built for me a place to store my goods when there is a fight here. This the police cannot discover. Come with me."

He held out his hand for the note, and Norroy gave it to him.

"Mind you, Georgios," he said, sternly, "if you betray me, not a penny, and, besides"—he pulled up his blouse and showed his revolver, which he tapped significantly—"mind you that, Georgios."

The little Armenian nodded. "You I will not betray, *effendi,*" he said, earnestly.

He took Norroy into the hall, and opened another door — they entered a private dining room, and the Armenian crossed the room to where hung a large icon, setting forth in crude colors the birth of Christ. The picture was taller than the average man, and was set firmly against the wall. The Armenian pulled against its right side and touched the head of one of the wise men in the picture. Immediately the supposed painting swung back like a door, and disclosed a little room built into a hollow of the wall, containing a straw pallet and a rude table.

The sounds of galloping horses came to the ears of Norroy. He stepped quickly within. The Armenian swung back the picture and draped the curtains over it—for icons are always hidden from the light.

Norroy lay down on the pallet and the Armenian went back to his room. He had hardly reseated himself before a *droshki,* containing a pretty woman, wrapped in furs, stopped before the Nikobadze, and the woman alighted. Georgios went into the hall to meet her.

The sounds of the horses' hoofs were now quite distinct, and the police were in full sight of the inn.

CHAPTER II.

IN THE PRIVATE DINING ROOM OF THE NIKOBADZE.

As the woman mounted the three narrow, wooden steps, Georgios threw open the glass-paned door, and stood obsequiously by while she entered. Then, closing the door, he advanced, rubbing his fat hands.

"How may I serve madame?" he inquired.

"I find that the train to Newchwang is an hour late, and that I must wait that time before taking it," she informed him. "Therefore, during that hour, I would have you serve me dinner."

"It is as madame wishes," said Georgios, bowing low.

"But I must be private and to myself," said the woman, imperiously. "I am the Countess Helma de Czechowicz. I will pay you well."

The Armenian wrinkled his brow. He had but one private dining room, and that contained the icon behind which lay the secret room—and the *effendi.* Yet it was but for an hour—and his face brightened. If she were in the room, the pursuing police would have less cause to search it.

"If you will follow me, madame." He opened the door to the private dining room. She entered.

"See that my *droshki* driver has a double measure of vodka—and some food. Then give him this" — she handed Georgios a two-rouble note— "and tell him that he may return to the city. I shall not need him longer."

"Yes, madame," bowed the innkeeper. "It shall be as madame says." He lighted the lamp on the center table and called for a Chinese boy to attend to the fire. Then he went out with many *salaams.* The Countess Helma removed her fur cloak, and took off her gloves and her ermine turban; then, sitting down by the table and taking a French novel from a small bag she carried, she began to turn the pages in search of the place where her perusal of the tale had ceased.

A Manchu boy entered with wood and coal in separate hods and set about replenishing the dying-out fire in the American stove in the center of the room. Outside, the snow was beginning to fall, and the horses of the oncoming mounted police left their hoof marks behind them in the white drift that was fast covering the ground. The countess drew her chair closer to the stove, giving the riders, as they drew up, but a cursory glance. She spoke to the coolie in Russo-Chinese, and bade him tell his master to have dinner prepared for her swiftly. Then she became engrossed in her De Maupassant story.

There was a knock at the door, and she called out admittance. The Armenian entered, rubbing his hands, apologetically.

"If madame pleases," he said, humbly. "A party of police have ridden up, and say that a spy is concealed within this inn. They demand the right to search this room? A captain of his imperial majesty's army is in charge, and I dare not refuse——"

The countess frowned. "Must I be disturbed by boorish police?" she said, in a displeased tone. "Tell them that a lady occupies this room, and she does not wish to be disturbed."

There was another knock on the door, and a voice called out: "Come, come, man, the captain does not wish to remain outside your door forever."

The Armenian opened the door. "The lady begs that you search the room swiftly, your excellency," he bowed. The officer swept him out of the way, and came into the apartment. The woman withdrew herself by the window and turned her head.

"Your pardon, madame," said the captain. "But I am looking for a dog of an Englishman who has stolen valuable papers, and believe him to be somewhere in this inn."

"I have just entered," she said, trying to make her voice calm. She recognized his tones, and did not wish him to see her face. "Search, but search quickly, as I wish to be alone."

She spoke softly and in an assumed voice. The officer busied himself in a tour of inspection, poking beneath divans and tables and opening closets. Finally he pushed back the curtains before the icon.

"A sacred picture, your excellency," almost groveled the Armenian. "An icon."

The officer removed his cap, involuntarily respectful, for religion enters largely into the Russian's code of right and wrong. Then he turned, and caught the woman's profile. He leaned forward, his face a picture of unbelief. Then with a cry, half savage in its intensity, he strode to her side.

"Helma!" he exclaimed. He turned to the Armenian. "Leave the room." The landlord hesitated. "Leave the room, filth!" added the officer, politely. Fearing complications unforeseen, the Armenian quitted the room, shaking as though with the ague.

"So I have found you," exclaimed the officer, unpleasantly. "What are you doing here?"

"What right have you to question me?" she returned, facing him. "Suppose you follow the landlord. This is my private room, and I do not desire your presence in it."

"I want an answer," he returned, fiercely. "An answer that explains your presence in this hole, unchaperoned, absolutely alone. Your father left you in my charge when he went to Vladivostok——"

"My stepfather," she corrected. "And I do not acknowledge his right to leave me in your charge. You have no jurisdiction over me, Captain Lenoff."

His quick eye caught a slip of yellow paper within the pages of the novel she had been reading. He reached down and jerked it forth. An ugly look crossed his face when it was plain to him.

"A railway pass to Newchwang," he said, furiously. "What——"

She crossed to the door and threw it open. "I must ask you to go, Captain Lenoff," she said, calmly.

"And I must answer you—thus." He pushed her roughly away, closed the door, locked it and put the key in his pocket. "Now, perhaps, the Countess Helma will be so kind as to answer my question."

"The Countess Helma does not recognize your right to ask it," returned the girl, with spirit. She stood erect, facing him, her great black eyes alight with indignation, and a crimson flush on her pale face.

The captain had evidently cooled a trifle at her determined attitude. He sat down on a chair near by and took a case from his pocket, extracting therefrom a tiny cigarette, half paper tube. This he lighted over the lamp, watching the girl, who continued to eye him steadily.

"So you think I have no right to ask the question?" he queried, mockingly. "Very well, my countess! If you do

not recognize my legal right, perhaps you will believe me when I refer you to the old saw which denominates might as being right. It seems to me that I have the might."

"You have taken advantage of my womanly weakness, that is all I can see, Captain Lenoff," she retorted, without a trace of fear in her tones. "But I do not see that it alters the situation at all."

Captain Lenoff leaned forward. "I came here to catch a spy to-night, but it seems that I shall catch something better," he said. "If you will not answer my question, I will tell you what your reply should have been: You are going to Newchwang, and from there to Peking—to that treacherous Polish rascal whom we drove out of Port Arthur."

She arose. "That *we* drove out of Port Arthur, Captain Lenoff? I think you are mistaken. Was it not Count Stanislas who spared your life in a duel after you had vilely slandered him?"

Lenoff's face grew very red. "At any rate, you shall not go," he said, determinedly.

"There is no law to prevent me. You dare not use force," she replied.

"Dare not?" He laughed. "Well, I haven't time to argue the question, for I have a spy to catch to-night; but I'll make sure you do not go to Newchwang." He folded the railway pass carefully and placed it in his pocket. She suddenly became aware what would be his next action, and made a wild grasp for her hand bag, which lay on the table. He reached for it at the same time, and a tug ensued. She held on with the grip of desperation.

"Oh! you coward!" she cried. "You coward! Let loose of that. It is mine. You have no right——" The tears welled up in her eyes.

"As I thought," smiled the captain, grimly, as he gradually pulled it from her. "Like all women, you keep your money in your bag. Without money or pass, I rather think you won't go to Newchwang."

She clutched the bag again, holding it over his hand. Her nails tore his wrist.

"Here! enough of that!" he said, sourly, and with a wrench he pulled the bag from her grasp and retreated to the other end of the room. He opened it and took out a packet of rouble notes and a letter of credit. Still smiling, he thrust them into his pocket and tossed the bag on the table.

"I'm sure you will not go to Newchwang now," he said. "And now I must be off to hunt the spy. I will put you in charge of two of my men."

She faced him, tearful and consumed with rage. "Oh! you coward—you mean, despicable cad!" she breathed. She made a quick dash across the room and plucked the money from his pocket, holding it firmly in both hands. His face darkened, and he seized her wrists.

"Give it up, Helma," he said, coldly. "Give it up. I do not want to hurt you. Why do you resist? You are powerless, little sister."

"Help! help!" she screamed, at the top of her lungs. "Help! help!"

"There is no one to help you," the man informed her, coolly.

The curtains before the icon parted, and Norroy stood in the shadow of the room. They had their backs to him, and he moved toward the door and stood facing the combatants.

"Pardon me?" he inquired, politely, one hand held behind his back. They did not seem to hear nor see him. "Pardon me," he repeated, in a louder tone, and speaking in French, "but do I intrude?"

The officer released the girl and faced him, astonishment and anger in his eyes. "Yes—you intrude," he said, loudly. "You intrude most damnably." As his eyes took in Norroy from head to foot, he started back startled and dismayed.

"It is—it is——" he muttered. "It is — the Englishman — the spy — the spy——"

His hand sought his pistol strapped to his belt, but the hand behind Norroy came immediately into full view, and Captain Lenoff found himself looking into the steel barrel of a Colt forty-five,

held steadily and unwaveringly by the hand of Mr. Yorke Norroy.

"Just take that toy out of your belt, captain," he said, suavely, "and put it on the table. Then put your sword beside it. If you make any noise, *mon ami,* I shall be under the painful necessity of getting rid of one of these cartridges—and I need them all badly. So hurry, *mon cher capitan.*"

Dazed and bewildered, Captain Lenoff obeyed instructions.

CHAPTER III.

CAPTAIN YORKE NORROY, H.I.R.M.S.

Norroy studied the Russian with a glint of humor in his eye, for it was a prearranged plan with him that this man should aid him in his escaping from the predicament in which the Finn had landed him. In the Russian's look there was much malevolence, and the secret agent noted that his glance wandered toward his belt.

"Really, I am becoming forgetful," continued Norroy. "I had omitted to mention that dirk, Captain Lenoff. Just lay that on the table, too, will you?"

"What do you mean?" growled Lenoff.

"I mean that little ornament you wear in your belt. Perhaps your possession of it slipped your memory. But I see the hilt showing." He advanced a few steps toward the officer, and indicated the weapon with a twirl of his revolver. Lenoff scowled and folded his arms.

"Come, come!" said Norroy, impatiently. "Don't let us dally. The dirk, man!" The cold light in the secret agent's indefinitely colored eyes was disquieting to the Russian in view of the fact that the revolver was now within a few inches of his nose. He put his hand to his belt, withdrew the tiny weapon, and, after fingering it uncertainly, threw it on the table also. Norroy advanced and picked up sword, pistol and dirk. The first two he dropped in a corner, but the dirk he retained.

"This is much more satisfactory," he said. "If I fired the revolver it might alarm your men. This will do its work silently!" Norroy thrust the Colt into its holster and held the dagger in his hand.

"From what I gather from madame's conversation and yours," he continued, bowing to the girl, who stood viewing him with undisguised amazement and a little alarm, "you seek to prevent her from carrying out her wishes without having any right so to do. Madame wishes to go to Newchwang. Therefore she should be allowed to go. In order that there will be no mistake, I am going to escort her there—with your permission, madame."

"Monsieur is very kind," murmured the girl, who had not yet fathomed the exact status of the case.

"So!" said Lenoff, sarcastically. "And may I ask monsieur the spy how he intends to leave Port Arthur without a passport?"

"Certainly you may," returned Norroy, smiling. "Because in order to see madame to the end of her journey, I am going to ask you to help me, *mon cher capitan.* In view of the fact that you have been very rude to madame, I think you will feel it your duty to accede to any little matters of convenience I may suggest." He fondled the dirk speculatively, and looked steadily at the Russian.

"Your description is in the hands of both police and soldiers," growled Lenoff. "And you'll not get away, mark that, M. Warrendell. You'll be taken back to Port Arthur and stood up against one of the walls of the Gold Hill Fort with a file of soldiers facing you. Don't flatter yourself your country can aid you. You are a spy, and international law doesn't recognize spies as having any nationality."

"Yes?" queried Norroy. "Well, perhaps you are wrong, *monsieur le capitan.* Now for the little favors I am going to ask of you. First return madame's railway pass and her letter of credit."

The Russian gave him a defiant look.

"I must warn you against delays—they are dangerous," pursued the secret agent, his eyes glittering. "Quick now!"

The Russian took the desired articles from his pocket and held them out to Norroy. The secret agent stretched forth his hand. The Russian gripped it tightly, and his other hand shot forth and seized the wrist of the one holding the dagger. With a sudden motion of his body Norroy twisted back both his opponent's hands; then, wheeling quickly, caught him about the neck in such a way as to render him powerless.

"Madame," he said, dispassionately, "your property is on the floor. I must ask you to pick it up." As the Countess Helma moved forward, he spoke in a very low tone to the man in his embrace. "If you attempt that again, Captain Lenoff, you will have your dirk restored to you in a way you won't like. Let me advise you again to do exactly as I tell you. Haven't you enough wits to see that I have the upper hand?" He released the glowering officer and stepped back.

"Now, madame," he continued, "kindly step into that closet at the end of the room and close the door. I am going to ask Captain Lenoff to loan me his uniform, and—you understand?"

The girl nodded, and entered the little closet, shutting the door after her.

"Now, *monsieur le capitan,*" went on Norroy, briskly. "I am going to ask you to hurry, as the stuffy closet is hardly a fit place for madame to remain in for any length of time."

"Hurry — what?" inquired Lenoff, sullenly.

"Hurry and disrobe. Take off your uniform and boots—and be quick about it, too."

"I shall do nothing of the sort," returned Lenoff, defiantly.

"Captain Lenoff," said Norroy, icily, "you are dealing with a man whose life is in some peril, and who will not hesitate to take yours in order to save his own. I must have that uniform. That will be my passport to Newchwang about which you inquired a moment ago. I should prefer that you give it to me yourself rather than that I strip it from you when you are *non est.*"

The way in which Norroy spoke, and the almost savage gleam of his eye, convinced Lenoff that refusal would be suicidal. He arose and threw off his long, gray coat, took off his riding boots and breeches, removed his blouse and waistcoat, and tossed his cap and sword belt on the top of the pile. Then, standing erect in his undergarments, he favored Norroy with an evil look. Norroy advanced, and, keeping an eye on Lenoff, pushed the clothes into another closet at the other end of the room. Then he took off his cartridge belt and unslung the dispatch bag he carried over his shoulder. From the lining of his coat he extracted papers and money which he placed in the dispatch bag, from the trousers he took out a few odds and ends, from the waistcoat a watch and fob and other trinkets. Then he laid his revolver and the Russian's dirk on a little tabouret.

"Now, Captain Lenoff," he said, quietly, "I am going to disrobe. I am just about three feet from you, and can seize you before you reach the door. As you know, I am stronger than you, and, besides, I hold the weapons. So, take my advice, and remain perfectly quiet."

Quickly Norroy threw his khaki-serge blouse to the floor, and drew off his tan boots. In exactly the same fashion as the Russian, he made a little pile of his clothing in the middle of the floor, Lenoff eying him in helpless rage. Norroy was also in his underclothes now. He picked up the long coat which the Russian had discarded and slipped it on. It reached nearly to his ankles.

"It is fortunate that you and I are about the same size, captain," he said, cheerily. "This coat fits me very well. I haven't time to try the others yet. Now, oblige me by arraying yourself in my garments—please don't argue the question."

Lenoff was reduced to a state of servile obedience. He feared this mad devil of an Englishman, whose strength of arm was so great, and whose manner showed that he would have little hesitation in dirking him if he refused to obey orders.

In a few moments he was dressed in

Norroy's clothes, and Norroy discarded the long coat and pulled on the sky-blue riding breeches and heelless black boots, after which went waistcoat and undress blouse. He strapped his cartridge belt and holster around his waist, but left the dirk on the table. Then he fastened the military collar of the blouse and eyed himself with some satisfaction in the pier glass.

"In truth, captain," he said, smiling, "I believe I make a far better Russian than you. Madame, you may re-enter."

At the sight of the transformed men, the Countess Helma broke into rippling laughter. Lenoff scowled.

"Now, madame," Norroy addressed her, "I see some picture cord there which supports those two paintings at the end of the room. From previous experience, I have found that picture cord makes an excellent substitute for rope. Will you kindly take the pictures down and untie the cord?"

The girl looked at him questioningly, and he nodded toward Lenoff. She smiled again, and untied the cord.

"Now I must ask you to put your hands behind your back, Captain Lenoff," he said. "This lady will then tie them together."

"Oh! monsieur," protested the Countess Helma.

"You wish to reach Newchwang, do you not?" inquired Norroy.

The girl said no more, but moved toward Lenoff, who made a sudden dash for Norroy. The outstretched dirk met him, and Norroy looked at him angrily.

"You have only to do that once more, Captain Lenoff," he said, with much sternness of manner, "and you will have made your last move in any direction. Put your hands behind your back. Tie him securely, Countess Helma."

The task was easily performed, and Norroy relieved her of the remainder of the picture cord, and, kneeling before the Russian, he tied his feet together. A sudden realization of his position came upon Lenoff. He knew what it would mean now if he were discovered in this predicament, his uniform and sword gone, and his quarry escaped.

"Gregorovitch!" he shouted loudly. "A spy! Help! Help!"

For a moment it looked as though Norroy were about to sheathe the dirk in a tender portion of his anatomy. But the secret agent paused in the very action and laughed.

"Exactly," he said, grimly. "Exactly. A spy!"

He placed his hand to his chin, and whisked off the false Vandyke beard which he wore, following it with the curling mustache, and stood clean shaven, as of yore. To tell the truth, Norroy could not have raised a beard.

He advanced on the Russian, still smiling, and fastened the beard and mustache on his face. Then, picking up his own felt hat, he slouched it over Lenoff's eyes. A handkerchief and a piece of stick were quickly converted into a gag, which was thrust into Lenoff's mouth, and twisted tightly, making speech impossible.

A knock came on the door without, and many voices cried out in Russian: "Open the door—open the door, captain!"

The girl was trembling in every limb, but Norroy's face showed nothing but amusement. He reached into his dispatch bag and extracted a wig, cut Russian style, and of a very black shade. This he put over his own hair. Then he picked up Lenoff's cap and pulled it down so as to shade his face; drew on the long coat and buckled the sword belt over it. The knocking on the door had become tempestuous and the shouting outside continued. Norroy reached into the corner, thrust the Russian's sword into the scabbard by his side, and placed the pistol in its holster. Then he stepped over to the lamp and turned the light low.

"Put on your hat and cloak, madame," he told the girl. In the distance the shrill whistle of a train was heard.

Norroy reached into the pocket of the long coat, and took out the doorkey, which the Russian had placed there. He unlocked the door, and a dozen imperial police stumbled in. At the sight of the officer they saluted.

"We heard you call, captain," said a sergeant of police, breathlessly. "You said a spy!"

"Precisely," returned Norroy, in perfect Russian, mimicking the deep tones of Lenoff to a nicety. "There he sits. He was concealed here. That is the man we are in search of, but he has no papers on him. He has confessed that a confederate has taken the papers to Newchwang. Is that not the whistle of the *wagon-lit* without?"

"Yes, captain," returned the sergeant. "The train leaves for Newchwang in less than five minutes."

"Then I will leave this man in your charge, sergeant. But one caution; do not ungag him. I have my reasons for ordering this. Take him to the Gold Hill Fort and do not ungag him until to-morrow morning. Do not ask me why. It is enough that I give the order."

The sergeant saluted again. "It shall be as you say, captain," he returned. "In truth, this is the very man. The description Mikhailovitch gave was correct. Might I ask, captain, how you captured him?"

"Through this lady, who is a secret agent of his excellency, M. Alexieff," replied Norroy, bowing to the girl. "But I have no time to waste. I must go to Newchwang. You will not forget my orders, sergeant. He must not be ungagged until to-morrow morning. If this order is not obeyed, serious mishaps may occur, and I shall hold you responsible—you understand?"

"Yes, captain," said the sergeant. "I understand, and will obey. Shall I inform the general that you have gone to Newchwang?"

"Yes. I shall return by the morning train, and I shall have the papers. You may tell him that, also. Come, madame, or we shall not catch the train." He bowed low to the bound Russian. "Adieu, monsieur the spy," he said, pleasantly.

The police made a way for him to pass out, and the two left the room. In the hall he encountered Georgios.

"I will send you a check from Peking," he breathed in his ear. The astonished Armenian, not understanding, looked after the pair in dumb amazement.

They reached the train just in time to board it, and went into a first-class compartment. Norroy's uniform was sufficient passport for both himself and the girl.

As he seated himself opposite her, his pent-up feelings of mirth broke loose, and he burst into the heartiest fit of laughter that had ever overcome him.

CHAPTER IV.

THE CONSCIENCE OF YORKE NORROY.

The Port Arthur train reached Newchwang at four o'clock the next morning, and, being unhampered with luggage, Norroy and the girl hastened from the station and entered a mandarin cart which took them to the banks of the Liaho River. It was bitterly cold and the blackness of the night was still on the land. The Liaho stretched before them, frozen, without a *pisa* in sight, but their cart driver finally routed up two sleeping coolies, and the little sleds were dragged out of huts and launched on the glassy surface. The passengers sat in the middle, while the coolies stood behind with long, steel-pointed poles, which they dug into the ice at intervals and sent the light craft skimming over the surface.

Half an hour in the face of the bleak wind, and they were landed on the frozen bank of the Yinkow side. It was nearing five o'clock now, and the train for Shan-hai-kuan left at that hour. They had time to spare, for the railroad station was very near. Norroy purchased two tickets of an inscrutable-looking Tartar, with long, drooping mustachios, and they went into their compartment.

Once out of Yinkow, there was no possibility of arrest, and when the last warning toot of the locomotive's whistle was heard, and the cars began to move, Norroy breathed a long sigh of relief.

The girl had been talking for some

time, and Norroy had been listening intently.

"It is then truth, monsieur, that you carry the plans of Port Arthur on your person?" she said.

"I have not told you so, madame," he replied.

"Assuming a purely hypothetical case, then," went on the girl, "you have the plans; you intend to surrender them to Japan. I am a Russian, monsieur, and I love my country. Lenoff is not a fair example of my countrymen, as you know, you who can speak our language so fluently. My stepfather has been unkind to me, and I am leaving him, and with him, Russia. Perhaps I shall never return. But I love my country, monsieur, I love my country as well as you love yours, and if you are English, you must love yours greatly.

"Suppose there should be war? If Japan were in possession of these papers which we suppose you carry, Port Arthur would easily fall before her. That would mean the end of Russia in the East. Perhaps you hate Russia as do most English. But is not Russian domination better than Japanese? Have you reflected what it would mean, should Japan rule Asia? Perhaps my own country is grasping, but is not Japan more so? Perhaps my own country does not always keep her promises, but when did Japan ever keep a promise?"

Norroy knew that what this girl said was truth. Russians he disliked, but not so much as he did Japanese.

"You know, you must know, since you are working for Japan, that she has no gratitude, no moral obligation. Remember the officers she decoyed from European armies and navies to officer her own people. She promised them retirement at double the salary their own government would have paid them. They went, they served Japan faithfully for years, they trained her soldiers and sailors. Then, when Japan had learned all they could teach her, she cut them adrift in their old age without a penny or a prospect. You know that is true."

"Yes," he agreed, "that is true."

"You, monsieur, you who are so brave and strong, should not stoop to such work for such a nation. Were it your own country that looked for war with mine, I would not urge you. But it is not for your country that you are doing this. Russia is cruel, corrupt, sometimes barbarous. But what of Japan?"

Norroy lighted a cigarette and nodded understandingly.

"It is much to ask of you, monsieur. And you have been so kind to me that I do not wish to appear ungrateful. You have risked your life for these papers. No doubt they are worth much to you. You have nothing to gain by doing what I wish unless you value your own self-appreciation. But perhaps you do not look at matters in the same light as I."

"Suppose you state explicitly what you wish me to do, countess," said Norroy, brushing the ashes from his cigarette.

"Do not, oh! do not take those papers to Japan. Ah! I have offended you, monsieur. I know it is much to ask, and I know that it appears presumptuous that I should judge you. But, monsieur, what you are doing is wrong—all wrong."

The secret agent looked out of the window of the car at the expanse of brown country covered with sparse vegetation, and through which the tiny canals wended their way like threads of silver. He said nothing, but he was thinking, nevertheless, thinking deeply. He had gone through much to win these papers. There was a reward at the end of his journey which would relieve him of financial embarrassment, and make him able to return to his own country, unfettered and under no obligations. On the other hand——

Around a curve of the road the Great Wall of China appeared, faint and shadowy. Within a few moments they would be out of Manchuria, and he would be free from any possible chance of trouble from Russia. The journey was nearly at an end, the results accomplished. It had taken time, trouble and much that was disagreeable to do the thing that she now asked him to undo.

"It is right," she murmured. "It is right. I only ask you to do what your own conscience must tell you is the only course."

He did not answer her. The train swept on until it looked as though the great wall was about to topple over upon them; a second later and the train swept through the break and they were speeding over Cheh-li province, with Manchuria and Russian domination behind. Shan-hai-kuan, with its barracks and hotel, was visible to the eye. Here, under the protection of American and Japanese arms, he was safe.

But he had made up his mind. His hand went into his breast, and a bulky package, bound with red tape, was extracted.

"These are the plans, madame," he said, simply. A little fire burned brightly in a stove in the center of the compartment. Norroy opened the door, and fingered the papers uncertainly. Then, with a quick movement, he cast them on the flames, and watched the hungry fire lap around their edges until a yellow spurt showed they were ignited.

"Ah! monsieur! monsieur!" she cried. The next moment she had thrown her arms about his neck and kissed him on the lips.

Gently he untwined her arms, and looked at her steadily.

"You are going to meet Count Stanislas in Peking," he said, slowly. "You are his fiancée, are you not, countess?"

"I was foolish—I did not know," she whispered. "You——"

The train came to a sudden stop, and, looking out of the window, the files of soldiers of many nations were seen drawn up to salute.

"Come," said Norroy. "Here is Shan-hai-kuan and the hotel. And remember that Count Stanislas loves and trusts you, even as my fiancée trusts me."

She uttered a faint cry as he declared the tie that bound him, but stifled her emotion and picked up her handbag. Norroy, smiling grimly, as he wondered what girl in the United States he could claim with any such title, opened the door for the Russian countess, and they left the train.

When he was alone in his room he eyed his likeness in the mirror.

"Yorke Norroy," he said, with much earnestness, "you are a fool."

But, somehow, the restful feeling that comes when one has done the right at all costs, did not bear out his reiterated statement to the inoffensive likeness.

SUB-LETTING A CONTRACT

A BENEVOLENT old lady happened one day to be visiting a school where a young incorrigible was undergoing punishment for a series of misdemeanors.

The teacher cited him as "the worst boy in the school—one I can't do anything with. I've tried everything in the way of punishment."

"Have you tried kindness?" was the gentle inquiry.

"I did at first, but I've got beyond that now."

At the close of the visit the lady asked the boy if he would call and see her on the following Saturday. A boy arrived promptly at the hour appointed. The old lady showed him her best pictures, played her liveliest music, and set before him a delicious lunch on her daintiest china. Then she thought it about time to begin her little sermon.

"My dear," she began, "were you not very unhappy to have to stand in the corner before all the class for punishment?"

"Please, ma'am," broke in the boy, with his mouth full of cake, "that wasn't me you saw. It was Pete. He gave me a nickel to come here and take your jawing."

THE MAROONED CAMPERS

By Charles Fort

Author of "With the Assistance of Fryhuysen," Etc.

The amusing experience of a party of young men who camped out. Though the spot they selected to pitch their tents was a peaceful one, they surely had no cause to complain of any lack of excitement

THERE is one reason why you should be astonished at nothing that we did. It is such a good reason that it would account for things even more foolish than we did.

We were very young.

When we were little boys we met in Billy Scrubbs' house. Perhaps two hundred times Mrs. Scrubbs broke up those meetings; certainly two hundred times old Mr. Scrubbs pounced upon us and drove us down the stairs—but we always came back. We had to; some meeting place was necessary to us when we were little boys, and the necessity continued when we were young fellows of twenty-two and twenty-three.

A dozen of us were in Billy's room. It was our room.

We were talking about a new billiard "shark." Then we went on to ballot-box stuffing.

Billy said: "I'm going camping."

And every one of the foolish, enthusiastic eleven cried: "So'm I!"

One wanted to go up the river; another wanted to go down the river; some wanted mountains; others wanted a lake.

Billy said: "I'm just going to get on the cars and not know where I'm going. Just keep on going till I come to a place I like. Then I'll get out, even if I have to keep on going all the way to Labrador."

And the foolish eleven cried: "So'm I!"

Jeb Heffles was cautious. He had to be; he was so heavy and clumsy that experience had taught him to look around before he moved.

Jeb said: "But we ought to send some one ahead to build a camp and have things ready."

Billy objected.

"In that case we would know where we were going, which would spoil the sport of the thing." His objection was sustained.

So, after great difficulties to arrange that our vacations should come together, we met one morning in the railroad station, and boarded a train, nearly going away without Tommy Swallow, who had to try every machine in the station that would produce anything for a penny in the slot.

We had tickets to Saratoga.

After leaving Saratoga, the conductor was astonished to see us still there.

"Can't stop now!" he exclaimed. "It's your own fault. The brakeman called out Saratoga plain enough."

We took tickets to Fort Edward, receiving rebate slips.

Again the conductor was astonished.

"Why, here! You're left again. We just passed Fort Edward."

We paid to Ticonderoga and got more rebate slips.

At Ticonderoga it was all we could do to rescue "Stretch" Leonard, whom the conductor had seized, determined

that at least one of us should not pass his station again. More rebates.

And then discussion began, as we rushed northward along the shore of Lake Champlain, with the opposite shore slowly retreating beyond a widening expanse of blue.

Tommy Swallow urged us to get out at a station, because he liked its name done artistically in clam shells. Guffy approved the looks of a girl in another station and wanted to camp there. But the truth is that most of us wanted to get as far away as we could; the remoter our camp, the more interesting it would be. So the rails kept on ticking under us, and the wise ones who had seized seats on the shady side found themselves on the sunny side, and the conductor kept on shaking his head hopelessly at us, trying to decide as to just what ward we had escaped from, until Billy Scrubbs cried:

"There's an island!"

At the next station we sprawled and tumbled out. For Billy had seen an island, and an island was just what we wanted. So through a small town we paraded, laden with canned goods and hams and celery salt, taking a road leading south, looking for Billy's island. Why, from our impression in the train, the island could not be a mile away, for Billy's exclamation had seemed to run into the brakeman's cry of the station. But we kept on walking until walking became trudging, and still nothing dotted the blue expanse that we saw in glimpses through trees.

Here and there was a house or a barn, but we disliked to question anyone. We might have been foolish, but it seemed a little too foolish to say: "Pardon me, but have you seen an island around here this afternoon?" Rather than to advertise for an island lost, strayed or stolen, we kept on trudging, Guffy making a fearful time of it because he had a case of canned goods on his back while some one else had a package of pepper in his pocket. Why, one would think that any place along the lake would do; there would be trees and water and rocks, just the same. Not a bit of it! We wanted that island, and nothing but that island would do; so we kept on trudging, and the island kept on hiding.

Some Billy or Tommy or Jimmie threw a stone at a cow. He seemed to resent the existence of a cow where he wanted everything aboriginal. And a farmer, a common, everyday farmer, who should have been a trapper or a scout, shouted at us from a distant field.

"Huh!" said Billy or Tommy, or whoever he was. "That native is making a great time over his old beast. You would think it a sacred cow!" You certainly would; for the farmer shouted faint words and gesticulated violently.

We forgot him. There was the island!

Just as we were reproaching Billy Scrubbs for seeing things in his imagination only, we rounded a curve. There was the little island, half a mile out, built of rocks high out of the lake, and with pines on top.

Drawn up on a beach were two old scows—leaky old tubs, with notches cut in their sides for oars. Naturally enough, they were ours. Six of us scrambled into one scow, and some one pushed out, sprawling over the stern, trying to keep his feet from getting wet. The other scow was launched, and we were pushing ripples ahead of us, halfway from the shore, when we heard shouting on the beach.

There was the farmer. Another farmer was with him. Both gesticulated with their fists so that we wondered what was so remarkable about their old cow, though, of course, we said we cared nothing for two farmers, twenty-seven farmers or ninety-two farmers. We kept on rowing. Rocks poked out of trees; trees crept further apart, and we could see leaves as well as pine needles.

We saw something else.

There was a hut on the island.

Then our disappointment was keen; after all our trudging and searching, we had arrived to find some one else in possession.

But it was our island! Hadn't Billy Scrubbs seen it first? Why, we'd be in-

vaders and pirates and all sorts of people! By every right the island was ours.

It was. When we climbed the rocks we found nothing but such an abandoned camp as one may see all along Lake Champlain. There was even a stove, which we disapproved, for we wanted to wrap fish and squirrels in clay and roast the lumps in a camp fire as woodsmen should, or toast something that had been alive, holding it on the end of a forked stick. The island, a hut for cooking and a hut for sleeping were ours, and some patriot climbed the highest tree to tie a flag on top.

Guffy was cook. He said he was, so the rest of us had to be contented with such titles as Admiral of the Fleet and Master of Perch Hounds, finding honors enough to go around.

Guffy! Next time we go camping, if anyone ever does go camping twice, we won't have any cook. For dinner we'd have canned salmon, which some idiot had supplied in vast quantities for this camp, around which fish leaped every few minutes—jumping at gnats and leaving bubbles, sometimes making a slapping sound, as if to remind us that we were surrounded by life away down deep.

Guffy kept us out of the kitchen and did mysterious things until he called us for the salmon. It was stewed. Guffy was the cook, and, despite threats and pleading, practiced his cooking with everything—frying canned corned beef, roasting bologna, even boiling pickles. He had to do something with everything, inasmuch as he was the cook.

We ate salmon, and then wanted to get in with the fish. The proudest moment in Tommy Swallow's life arrived. He had many interesting scars, but they had always been covered up. When the rest of us were testing the water with our toes, he was proudly showing what barbed wire had done to him. Some of us plunged and some sneaked in, air above and water below warm enough, but an icy rim creeping up; Tommy was telling the story of the mark on his left knee. He was conceitedly showing what a hatchet had done to him, continuing as a guide book to his scars, when some one came along with a push, and he brought up pebbles to prove that he had reached bottom.

Guffy called us. Been cooking again! It was nowhere near time for supper, but Guffy was cook, and would cook if his cooking should bankrupt us. This time we had a ragout of minced bacon, raspberry jam and sardines.

Guffy said: "It's great!"

He said: "Ain't it funny? Why, I never knew that I could cook! It just comes to me naturally." Then he did desperate things with soused mackerel, smoked herring and salt cod, while the rest of us went away to fish.

Some Billy or Jimmie dropped a spoon hook, and, with it lying idle, tried to catch perch, and some other Billy or Jimmie trolled with a worm for pike, for there were earthworms on the island, and we wondered how they got there, never having seen any swim. The rest of us sat in a row with rods in a line and talked learnedly of split bamboo, gaffs and landing nets. "Stretch" Leonard caught a fish.

"Time for supper, boys!" called Guffy; and some Ike or Harry rowed over to the mainland for milk, which Guffy assured us was indispensable in his cooking.

Ike or Harry, or whoever he was, came back with no milk, but a story that excited us. He had gone to a farmhouse. It was on the farm where one of us had insulted the cow. Some one had begun shouting the moment that he appeared, and the violence of the shouting had made him so thoughtful that he had gone no nearer.

Well, let them shout; they were jealous of us, living on our island, enjoying ourselves, while they pushed old hoes and plows. And, in spite of even Guffy, we did enjoy ourselves.

You know how a brown branch of dead pine will burn. We trimmed off a pile of branches. A spark in its midst leaped through the dried needles and spread with a roar. It was night, but we were in a patch of light, while Guffy used the only lantern to go on cooking—experimenting with ham, and finding out how many things might be done

with boned chicken, lamenting because he had not the bones for soup, really wanting us to go ashore and take the bones away from a chicken, to see what he could do with them.

But never mind Guffy, who would surely bankrupt us in time; the rest of us told stories. Curiously enough, most of them were respectable stories. We were away off on an island in a great lake. To be sure, there were farms, but we thought only of the woods on shore. There was no older person to keep us in order. There was no law among us, and because we were on an island we seemed to be away from things as things are.

It was the water; perhaps the trees; perhaps the rocks. We felt gentle and quiet around the fire. We began to call one another "pard" and all that sort of thing, though in the city most of us had never been very good friends, simply clubbing together because one has to know some one, you know.

We sang, "Comrades, comrades, ever since we were boys!"

We really were. We certainly were, though there had been a hundred quarrels among us, some so lasting that only trees and rocks and water could patch them up. We sang that we were comrades; and an old pine tree or an old bald rock made it real.

Guffy cried from the kitchen: "Great! It must have been in me all the while, but I never suspected how I could cook!"

We suspected a good deal, but could prove few identities, as we forced ourselves to try his latest compound.

We crept into bunks, and there was a shower of thumps. Shoes were coming off.

In the morning the admiral manned his fleet, and we went out in the scows. Going nowhere in particular; just wanting to know what was behind the first point of land, or splash around on the beach, or perhaps row up the creek to see what came next.

Four men with shotguns stood on the beach. They cried: "Keep off!"

Keep off? That seemed rather a remarkable command. Instead of keeping off, we kept on rowing. A shotgun was fired to our left. We were astonished by the widespread jumping of tiny fountains from a muzzle not wider than an inch; then we realized that business was meant.

The admiral directed that the fleet should go to the point.

Three men, one with a rifle, cried:

"Keep off!"

We tried the mouth of the creek.

"Keep off!"

We kept off.

Several times during the day we tried to row to the mainland.

"Keep off!"

We kept off.

Then we were prisoners. For some unknown reason, perhaps until a sufficient force to attack us could be gathered, we were held on the island. And, so far as we knew, our only crime was that one of us had insulted a cow. What kind of a cow? Why such a susceptible cow?

Now, you know how young fellows are. You know just how great is their conceit. That anyone or any number of anyones should make us prisoners hurt our self-respect so that we were—why, we were terrific! Each one of the twelve felt himself not one of twelve, but all twelve put together. We'd do this! We'd do that!

We did nothing. Along the shore shotguns sprouted.

And we cared nothing for fishing; we cared nothing for swimming; all that we wanted was to get away from this island that we had so very much wanted to get to.

Only one of us was without excitement.

Said Guffy: "Great! Come try succotash and marmalade."

There was a growing crowd on the beach; it grew until night, and then along the beach was the flashing of lanterns.

We thought of sending the admiral alone with a white flag to patch up the difficulty, if possible.

Prisoners on that wretched little island! We had a hundred yards of freedom in any direction, yet we paced up

and down in batches of three. Four batches paced up and down with the feeling that one would have if a prisoner on a whole continent.

Billy Scrubbs had seemed to be our leader, but the situation created big, fat Jeb Heffles. For we were starving after the third day. Every can had been opened by our wicked, wasteful cook—and we were starving! To be sure, we could catch fifty, sixty—who knows how many?—fish a day. But just because there was nothing reserved in the larder, we were sure we were starving, though perch, and even lake trout, pushed out their noses all around us.

Time? Never tell one of us that life is short! Minutes were long, slim things divided by seconds ticking reluctantly. Hours? We were sure that there could not be more than six or seven in an ordinary lifetime. We played poker for our rebate slips until Hamilton got them all and hasn't worked since. Just to help along the time, we dug a hole in the center of the island, where the earth was soft, merely to see how deep we could dig. We paced in batches of three, and no batch would speak to another except unpleasantly.

Night came on, and lanterns twinkled as they moved alongshore behind trees here and there. We were watching lanterns, wondering how far they would go and where they would go next, when Jeb Heffles could stand it no longer.

Said Jeb: "Fellers, just give me Tommy's revolver. That's all I want! We'll swim over to the mouth of the creek, where the lantern shows the last outpost. I'll kill that fellow, and all of you be primed to swear it was self-defense."

Never before had any of us taken part in a killing. It was very interesting. Jeb might do it, but to each of us a twelfth of a notch would be accredited.

Said Jeb: "The scows would be spotted, so we'll swim to the mainland in a bunch, and here's an old door for a raft to pile our clothes on."

It was a dark night. The only stars that twinkled were the red and blue and green ones on the shore; and we piled our clothes on the raft, so that in the dark to pick out the right shoes or coats or anything else would be impossible.

There was not a splash as we sank cautiously into the water, which seemed many degrees warmer, with no sun to warm it. We swam together, all twelve of us, two dragging the raft behind and Jeb Heffles with his hands or with his nose pushing a cracker box ahead. In it was the revolver. We kept Guffy in the center, because a half-mile swim might be too much for him. If it should be, there were eleven close by to help him, even if they could never quite forgive him. We whispered and called softly to assure ourselves that no one had fallen behind. And on we went, white dashes flitting through dark water, with pines on shore seeming to make jagged shadows even on blackness.

It was hard work for Guffy, but he spoke only once.

He said: "What a shame I used up all the vanilla before I could try it with sauerkraut!"

We said: "Save your breath, and just wait till we get you home, Guffy!" but we kept close to him, and our fastest swimming was no faster than his slowest.

Our knees grated on sunken rocks; we had reached the shore, and a red lantern was not more than fifty feet away.

Then Jeb squirmed out of the water without a sound except faint dripping, bearing his cracker box. Big, powerful fellow, a fit match for any man. But what struck us at the time was that he had to give a valuable minute or so to dress first. It was nothing like modesty, but with not a second to waste, Jeb seemed to feel that without clothes he would be helpless and a match for no one.

He slipped through the trees and won a little battle without fighting. He called softly, and each of us, scrambling into some one else's clothes, traced him by his voice and the light of the lantern.

Jeb was fondling his revolver as if recognizing its power, yet ashamed to appear melodramatic. In a silly kind of a way he was saying to a man with a gun at his feet:

"Now, you know what I'll do to you! Now, it's self-defense, you know! Now, don't try any tricks, you know!"

And the man seemed to shrivel away from him and moved his hands as if to ward off the rest of us.

Why, even the cow could not have been more insulted than we were! This man, even in his fear of Jeb's revolver, waved us from him as if excommunication or something like it had befallen us.

We were excited and crowded around; that is, all but Guffy, who looked at a treetop and said:

"I wonder how coffee would go in beef stew."

Said Jeb: "Now, you don't want to try any tricks, you know! But where's the nearest railroad station? We're about tired of this sort of thing. Where's the nearest station? You've got to show us."

Said the man: "I'll show you, and only too glad to. Keep my gun and keep it pointed at me, but don't touch me and don't come nearer than twenty feet. The station ain't three miles away." And he led us to the station without trying to trick us.

We had escaped, and our vacation had been enjoyable enough, after all; still, there was something that we wanted to know, standing there waiting for the train, tall fellows in short fellows' trousers, and long-armed fellows with sleeves ending above their wrists.

We asked him what all the trouble was.

"Don't touch me! Just keep away is all I ask! Why, they had smallpox in town, and you came along and took the quarantine camp!"

Well, some of us edged away and some of us sprang away, each fearing that some one else would infect him.

We're alive yet!

We're even planning another vacation, though this time we'll have one without any germs in it.

A RURAL ART CRITIC

A COUNTRYMAN and his wife paid a visit to a well-known art museum the other day, and their comments and criticisms on the pictures and statuary afforded the other patrons not a little amusement.

One painting in particular took the farmer's fancy, and he proceeded to criticise the work in a tone which could be heard all over the building.

"See that, Maria?" he remarked to his wife. "There's life for yer—there's natur! Jest look at that there tiger skin——"

"Leopard's skin, John," corrected the woman.

"O' course, o' course—leopard's skin," went on John. "It's an eye-opener, that is—as natural as milk is to calves. Then look at that there road winding down atween them hills——"

"That's a river, John," said the woman.

"Oh, yes—we'll call it a river, then," continued the critic. "It's fine, ain't it? Then did yer ever see anything more natural than that windmill at the back——"

"That ain't a windmill, John," said his wife. "That's one o' them Hindoo temples."

That was the last straw, and John turned on his better half and demanded in a voice of thunder:

"Are you criticising this picture, or am I? Go away, woman," he added in a tone of deep disgust. "Go away and find a picture for yourself!"

AYESHA

OR, THE RETURN OF "SHE"

By H. Rider Haggard

Author of "She," "Allan Quatermain," "King Solomon's Mines," Etc.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE YIELDING OF AYESHA.

WHEN I had satisfied myself, Leo was still at his meal, for loss of blood, or the effects of the tremendous nerve tonic which Ayesha ordered to be administered to him, had made him ravenous.

I watched his face and became aware of a curious change in it; no immediate change, indeed, but one, I think, that had come upon him gradually, although I only fully appreciated it now, after our short separation. In addition to the thinness of which I have spoken, his handsome countenance had grown more ethereal; his eyes were full of the shadows of things that were to come.

His aspect pained me, I knew not why. It was no longer that of the Leo with whom I was familiar—the deep-chested, mighty-limbed, jovial, upright traveler, hunter and fighting man who had chanced to love and be loved of a spiritual power incarnated in a mold of perfect womanhood and armed with all the might of nature's self. These things were still present, indeed, but the man was changed, and I felt sure that this change came from Ayesha, since the look upon his face had become exceeding like to that which often hovered upon hers at rest.

She also was watching him, with speculative, dreamy eyes, till presently, as some thought swept through her, I saw those eyes blaze up, and the red blood pour to cheek and brow. Yes, the mighty Ayesha, whose dead, slain for him, lay strewn by the thousand on yonder plain, blushed and trembled like a maiden at her first lover's kiss.

Leo rose from the table. "I would that I had been with thee in the fray," he said.

"At the drift there was fighting," she answered, "afterward none. My ministers of fire, earth and air smote, no more; I waked them from their sleep, and, at my command, they smote for thee and saved thee."

"Many lives to take for one man's safety," Leo said solemnly, as though the thought pained him.

"Had they been millions and not thousands, I would have spent them, every one. On my head be their deaths, not on thine. Or, rather, on hers," and she pointed to the dead Atene. "Yes, on hers who made this war. At least she should thank me who have sent so royal a host to guard her through the darkness."

"Yet it is terrible," said Leo, "to think of thee, beloved, red to the hair with slaughter."

"What reck I?" she answered, with a splendid pride. "Let their blood suffice to wash the stain of thy blood from off these cruel hands that once did murder thee."

"Who am I that I should blame

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This story began in the January issue. The back numbers can be obtained through any newsdealer Price, ten cents each.

thee?" Leo went on as though arguing with himself. "I who but yesterday killed two men—to save myself from treachery."

"Speak not of it," she exclaimed in cold rage. "I saw the place, and, Holly, thou knowest how I swore that a hundred lives should pay for every drop of that dear blood of thine, and I, who lie not, have kept the oath. Look now on that man who stands yonder struck by my will to stone, dead yet living, and say again what was he about to do to thee when I entered here?"

"To take vengeance on me for the doom of his queen and of her armies," answered Leo, "and, Ayesha, how knowest thou that a power higher than thine own will not demand it yet?"

As he spoke a pale shadow flickered on Leo's face, such a shadow as might fall from death's advancing wing, and in the fixed eyes of the Shaman there shone a stony smile.

For a moment terror seemed to take Ayesha, then it was gone as quickly as it came.

"Nay," she said. "I ordain that it shall not be, and, save one who listeth not, what power reigns in this wide earth that dare defy my will?"

So she spoke, and as her words of awful pride—for they were very awful—rang round that stone-built chamber, a vision came to me—Holly.

I saw illimitable space peopled with shining suns, and sunk in the infinite void above them one vast Countenance clad in a calm so terrific that at its aspect my spirit sank to nothingness. Yes, and I knew that this was Destiny enthroned above the spheres. Those lips moved and obedient worlds rushed upon their course. They moved again and these rolling chariots of the heavens were turned or stayed, appeared or disappeared. I knew also that against this calm Majesty the being, woman or spirit, at my side had dared to hurl her passion and her strength. My soul reeled. I was afraid.

The dread phantasm passed, and when my mind cleared again Ayesha was speaking in new, triumphant tones.

"Nay, nay," she cried. "Past is the night of dread; dawns the day of victory! Look!" and she pointed through the window places shattered by the hurricane, to the flaming town beneath, whence rose one continual wail of misery, the wail of women mourning their countless slain while the fire roared through their homes like some unchained and rejoicing demon. "Look, Leo, on the smoke of the first sacrifice that I offer to thy royal state, and listen to its music. Perchance thou deemest it naught. Why, then, I'll give thee others. Thou lovest war. Good! we will go down to war, and the rebellious cities of the earth shall be the torches of our march."

She paused a moment, her delicate nostrils quivering, and her face alight with the prescience of ungarnered splendors; then, like a swooping swallow, flitted to where, by dead Atene, the gold circlet fallen from the Khania's hair lay upon the floor.

She stooped, lifted it, and, coming to Leo, held it on high above his head. Slowly she let her hand fall until the glittering coronet rested for an instant on his brow. Then she spoke, in her glorious voice that rolled out rich and low, a very pæan of triumph and of power.

"By this poor, earthly symbol I create thee King of Earth; yea, in its round for thee is gathered all her rule. Be thou its king, and mine!"

Again the coronet was held aloft, again it sank, and again she said, or, rather, chanted:

"With this unbroken ring, token of eternity, I swear to thee the boon of endless days. Endure thou while the world endures, and be its lord, and mine."

A third time the coronet touched his brow.

"By this golden round I do endow thee with wisdom's perfect gold uncountable, that is the talisman whereat all nature's secret paths shall open to thy feet. Victorious, victorious, tread thou her wondrous ways with me, till from her topmost peak at last she wafts us to our immortal throne whereof the columns twain are life and death."

Then Ayesha cast away the crown, and lo! it fell upon the breast of the lost Atene and rested there.

"Art content with these gifts of mine, my lord?" she cried.

Leo looked at her sadly and shook his head.

"What more wilt thou, then? Ask it and I swear it shall be thine."

"Thou swearest; but wilt thou keep the oath?"

"Ay, by myself I swear; by myself and by the Strength that bred me. If it be aught that I can grant—then if I refuse it to thee, may such destruction fall upon me as will satisfy even Atene's watching soul."

I heard, and I think that another heard, also; at least, once more the stony smile shone in the eyes of the Shaman.

"I ask of thee nothing that thou canst not give. Ayesha, I ask of thee thyself—not at some distant time when I have been bathed in a mysterious fire, but now, now, this night."

She shrank back from him a little, as though dismayed.

"Surely," she said, slowly, "I am like that foolish philosopher who, walking abroad to read the destinies of nations in the stars, fell down a pitfall dug by idle children and broke his bones and perished there. Never did I guess that with all these glories stretched before thee, like mountain top on glittering mountain top, making a stairway for thy mortal feet to the very dome of heaven, thou wouldst still clutch at thy native earth and ask of it—but the common boon of woman's love.

"Oh! Leo, I thought that thy soul was set upon nobler aims, that thou wouldst pray me for wider powers, for a more vast dominion; that as though they were but yonder fallen door of wood and iron, I should break for thee the bars of Hades, and like the Eurydice of old fable draw thee living down the steeps of death, or throne thee midst the fires of the furthest sun to watch its subject worlds at play.

"Or I thought that thou wouldst bid me reveal what no woman ever told, the bitter, naked truth—all my sins and sorrows, all the wandering fancies of my fickle thought; even what thou knowest not, and, perchance, ne'er shalt know, *who I am and whence I came,* and how to thy charmed eyes I seemed to change from foul to fair, and what is the purpose of my love for thee, and what the meaning of that tale of an angry goddess—who never was except in dreams.

"I thought—nay, no matter what I thought, save that thou wert far otherwise than thou art, my Leo, and in so high a moment that thou wouldst seek to pass the mystic gates my glory can throw wide and with me tread an air supernal to the hidden heart of things. Yet thy prayer is but the same that the whole world whispers beneath the silent moon, in the palace and the cottage, among the snows and on the burning desert's waste. 'Oh! my love, thy lips, thy lips. Oh! my love, be mine, now, now, beneath the moon, beneath the moon!'

"Leo, I thought better, higher, of thee."

"Mayhap, Ayesha, thou wouldst have thought worse of me had I been content with thy suns and constellations and spiritual gifts and dominations that I neither desire nor understand.

"If I had said to thee: Be thou my angel, not my wife; divide the ocean that I may walk its bed; pierce the firmament and show me how grow the stars; tell me the origins of being and of death and instruct me in their issues; give up the races of mankind to my sword, and the wealth of all the earth to fill my treasuries. Teach me also how to drive the hurricane as thou canst do, and to bend the laws of nature to my purpose; on earth make me half a god—as thou art.

"But, Ayesha, I am no god; I am a man, and as a man I seek the woman whom I love. Oh! divest thyself of all these wrappings of thy power—that power which strews thy path with dead and keeps me apart from thee. If only for one little hour forget the ambition that gnaws unceasingly at thy soul; I say, forget thy greatness and be a woman and—my wife."

She made no answer, only looked at him and shook her head, causing her

glorious hair to ripple like water beneath a gentle breeze.

"Thou deniest me," he went on, with gathering strength, "and that thou canst not do, that thou mayest not do, for, Ayesha, thou hast sworn, and I demand the fulfillment of thine oath.

"Hark, thou. I refuse thy gifts; I will have none of thy rule, who ask no Pharaoh's throne and wish to do good to men and not to kill them—that the world may profit. I will not go with thee to Kôr, nor be bathed in the breath of Life. I will leave thee and cross the mountains, or perish on them, nor with all thy strength canst thou hold me to thy side, who, indeed, needest me not. No longer will I endure this daily torment, the torment of thy presence and thy sweet words; thy loving looks, thy promises for next year, next year —next year. So keep thine oath or let me begone."

Still Ayesha stood silent, only now her head drooped and her breast began to heave. Then Leo stepped forward; he seized her in his arms and kissed her. She broke from his embrace, I know not how, for, though unreturned, it was close enough, and again stood before him, but at a little distance.

"Did I not warn Holly," she whispered, with a sigh, "to bid thee beware lest I should catch thy human fire? Man, I say to thee, it begins to smolder in my heart, and should it grow to flame——"

"Why, then," he answered, laughing, "we will be happy for a little while."

"Ay, Leo, but how long? Why wert thou sole lord of this loveliness of mine and not set above their harming? Night and day a hundred jealous daggers would seek thy heart and—find it."

"How long, Ayesha? A lifetime, a year, a month, a minute—I neither know nor care, and while thou art true to me I fear no stabs of envy."

"Is it so? Wilt take the risk? I can promise thee nothing. Thou mightest —yes, in this way or in that, thou mightest—die."

"And if I die, what, then? Shall we be separated?"

"Nay, nay, Leo, that is not possible. We never can be severed, of this I am sure; it is sworn to me. But then through other lives and other spheres, higher lives and higher spheres, mayhap, our fates must force a painful path to their last goal of union."

"Why, then, I take the hazard, Ayesha. Shall the life that I can risk to slay a leopard or a lion in the sport of an idle day, be too great a price to offer for the splendors of thy breast? Thine oath! Ayesha, I claim thine oath."

Then it was that in Ayesha there began the most mysterious and thrilling of her many changes. Yet how to describe it I know not, unless it be by simile.

Once in Thibet we were imprisoned for months by snows that stretched down from the mountain slopes into the valleys, and, oh! how weary did we grow of those arid, aching fields of purest white. At length rain set in, and blinding mists in which it was not safe to wander, that made the dark nights darker yet.

So it was until there came a morning when, seeing the sun shine, we went to our door and looked out. Behold a miracle! Gone were the snows that choked the valley, and in the place of them appeared vivid springing grass, starred everywhere with flowers, and murmuring brooks and birds that sang and nested in the willows. Gone was the frowning sky, and all the blue firmament seemed one tender smile. Gone were the austerities of winter, with its harsh winds, and in their place spring, companioned by her zephyrs, glided down the vale singing her song of love and life.

There, in this high chamber, in the presence of the living and the dead, while the last act of the great tragedy unrolled itself before me, looking on Ayesha, that forgotten scene sprang into my mind. For on her face just such a change had come. Hitherto, with all her loveliness, the heart of Ayesha had seemed like that winter mountain wrapped in its unapproachable snow, and before her pure brow and icy self-

command aspirations sank abashed and desire died.

She swore she loved, and her love fulfilled itself in death and many a mysterious way. Yet it was hard to believe that this passion of hers was more than a spoken part, for how can the star seek the moth, although the moth may seek the star? Though the man may worship the goddess, for all her smiles divine, how can the goddess love the man?

But now everything was altered! Look! Ayesha grew human; I could see her heart beat beneath her robes and hear her breath come in soft, sweet sobs, while o'er her upturned face and in her alluring eyes there spread itself that look which is born of love alone. Radiant and more radiant did she seem to grow, sweeter and more sweet, no longer the veiled hermit of the caves, no longer the oracle of the sanctuary, no longer the Valkyrie of the battle plain, but only the loveliest and most happy bride that ever gladdened a husband's eyes.

She spoke, and it was of little things, for thus she proclaimed the conquest of herself.

"Fie!" she said, showing her white robes torn with spears and stained by the dust and dew of war; "fie, my lord, what marriage garments are these in which at last I come to thee, who would have been adorned in regal gems and raiment befitting to my state and thine?"

"I seek the woman, not her garment," said Leo, his burning eyes fixed upon her face.

"Thou seekest the woman. Ah! there it lies. Tell me, Leo, am I woman or spirit? Say that I am woman, for now the prophecy of this dead Atene lies heavy on my soul, Atene who said that mortal and immortal may not mate."

"Thou must be woman, or thou wouldst not have tormented me as thou hast done these many weeks."

"I thank thee for the comfort of thy words. Yet was it *woman* whose breath wrought destruction upon yonder plain? Was it to a *woman* that Blast and Lightning bowed and said: 'We are here—command us, we obey'? Did that dead thing"—and she pointed to the shattered door—"break inward at a *woman's* will? Or could a *woman* charm this man to stone?

"Oh! Leo, would that I were woman! I tell thee that I'd lay all my grandeur down, a wedding offering at thy feet, could I be sure that for one short year I should be naught but *woman* and—thy happy wife.

"Thou sayest that I did torment thee, but it is I who have known torment, I who desired to yield and dared not. Ay, I tell thee, Leo, were I not sure that thy little stream of life is draining dry into the great ocean of my life, drawn thither as the sea draws its rivers, or as the sun draws mists, e'en now I would not yield. But I know, for my wisdom tells it me, ere ever we could reach the shores of Libya, the ill work would be done, and thou dead of thine own longing, thou dead and I widowed who never was a wife.

"Therefore, see! like lost Atene, I take the dice and cast them, not knowing how they shall fall. Not knowing how they shall fall, for good or ill I cast," and she made a wild motion as of some desperate gamester throwing his last throw.

"So," Ayesha went on, "the thing is done, and the number summed for ay, though it be hidden from my sight. I have made an end of doubts and fears, and come death, come life, I'll meet it bravely.

"Say, how shall we be wed? I have it. Holly here must join our hands; who else? He that ever was our guide shall give me unto thee, and thee to me. This burning city is our altar, the dead and living are our witnesses on earth and heaven. In place of rites and ceremonials for this first time I lay my lips on thine, and when 'tis done, for music I'll sing thee a nuptial chant of love such as mortal poet has not written nor have mortal lovers heard.

"Come, Holly, do now thy part and give this maiden to this man."

Like one in a dream I obeyed her and took Ayesha's outstretched hand and Leo's. As I held them thus, I tell

the truth—it was as though some fire rushed through my veins from her to him, shaking and shattering me with swift waves of burning and unearthly bliss. With the fire, too, came glorious visions and sounds of mighty music, and a sense as though my brain, filled with overflowing life, must burst asunder beneath its weight.

I joined their hands, I know not how; I blessed them, I know not in what words. Then I reeled back against the wall and watched.

This is what I saw.

With an abandonment and a passion so splendid and intense that it seemed more than human, with a murmured cry of "Husband!" Ayesha cast her arms about her lover's neck and drawing down his head to hers so that the gold hair was mingled with her raven locks, she kissed him on the lips.

Thus they clung a little while, and as they clung the gentle diadem of light from her brow spread to his brow also, and through the white wrappings of her robe became visible her perfect shape shining with faint fire. With a little, happy laugh she left him, saying:

"Thus, Leo Vincey, oh! thus for the second time do I give myself to thee, and with this flesh and spirit all I swore to thee, there in the dim Caves of Kôr and here in the palace of Kaloon. Know thou this, come what may, never, never more shall we be separate who are ordained one. Whilst thou livest I live at thy side, and when thou diest, if die thou must, I'll follow thee through worlds and firmaments, nor shall all the doors of heaven or hell avail against my love. Where thou goest, thither I will go. When thou sleepest, with thee will I sleep, and it is my voice that thou shalt hear murmuring through the dreams of life and death; my voice that shall summon thee to awaken in the last hour of everlasting dawn, when all this night of misery hath furled her wings for ay.

"Listen, now, while I sing to thee, and hear that song aright, for in its melody at length thou shalt learn the truth, which, unwed, I might not tell to thee. Thou shalt learn who and what *I* am, and who and what *thou* art, and of the high purposes of our love, and this dead woman's hate, and of all that I have hid from thee in veiled, bewildering words and visions.

"Listen, then, my love and lord, to the burden of the Song of Fate."

She ceased speaking and gazed heavenward with a rapt look, as though she waited for some inspiration to fall upon her, and never, never—not even in the fires of Kôr—had Ayesha seemed so divine as she did now.

My eyes wandered from her to Leo, who stood before her pale and still, still as the deathlike figure of the Shaman, still as the Khania's icy shape which stared upward from the ground. What was passing in his mind, I wondered, that he could remain thus insensible while in all her might and awful beauty this proud being worshiped him.

Hark! she began to sing in a voice so rich and perfect that its honeyed notes seemed to cloy my blood and stop my breath.

The world was not, was not, and in the womb of Silence
Slept the souls of men.
Yet I was and thou——

Suddenly Ayesha stopped, and I felt rather than saw the horror on her face.

Look! Leo swayed to and fro, as though the stones beneath him were but a rocking boat. To and fro he swayed, stretched out his blind arms to clasp her—then suddenly fell backward and lay still.

Oh! what a shriek was that she gave! Surely it must have wakened the very corpses upon the plain. Surely it must have echoed in the stars. One shriek only—then throbbing silence.

I sprang to him, and there, withered in Ayesha's kiss, slain by the fire of her love, Leo lay dead—lay dead upon the breast of dead Atene!

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE PASSING OF AYESHA.

I heard Ayesha say presently, and the words struck me as dreadful in their hopeless acceptance of a doom

against which even she had no strength to struggle:

"It seems that my lord has left me for a while; I must hasten to my lord afar."

After that I do not quite know what happened. I had lost the man who was all in all to me, friend and child in one, and I was crushed as I had never been before. It seemed so sad that I, old and outworn, should still live on, whilst he, in the flower of his age, snatched from joy and greatness such as no man hath known, lay thus asleep.

I think that, by an afterthought, Ayesha and Oros tried to restore him, tried without result, for here her powers were of no avail. Indeed, my conviction is that, although some lingering life still kept him on his feet, Leo had really died at the moment of her embrace, since when I looked at him before he fell, his face was that of a dead man.

Yes, I believe that last speech of hers, although she knew it not, was addressed to his spirit, for in her burning kiss his flesh had perished.

When, at length, I recovered myself a little, it was to hear Ayesha, in a cold, calm voice—her face I could not see, for she had veiled herself—commanding certain priests, who had been summoned, to "bear away the body of that accursed woman, and bury her as befits her rank." Even then I bethought me, I remember, of the tale of Jehu and Jezebel.

Leo, looking strangely calm and happy, lay now upon a couch, the arms folded on his breast. When the priests had tramped away, bearing their royal burden, Ayesha, who sat by his body brooding, seemed to awake, for she rose and said:

"I need a messenger, and for no common journey, since he must search out the habitations of the Shades," and she turned herself toward Oros and appeared to look at him.

Now, for the first time, I saw that priest change countenance a little, for the eternal smile, of which even this scene had not quite rid it, left his face, and he grew pale and trembled.

"Thou art afraid," she said, contemptuously. "Be at rest, Oros, I will not send one who is afraid. Holly, wilt thou go for me—and him?"

"Ay," I answered: "I am weary of life and desire no other end. Only let it be swift and painless."

She mused a while, then said:

"Nay, thy time is not yet, thou still hast work to do. Endure, my Holly, 'tis only for a breath."

Then she looked at the Shaman, the man turned to stone who all this while had stood there as a statue stands, and cried:

"Awake!"

Instantly he seemed to thaw into life, his limbs relaxed, his breast heaved, he was as he had always been—ancient, gnarled, malevolent.

"I hear thee, mistress," he said, bowing as a man bows to the power that he hates.

"Thou seest, Simbri?" and she waved her hand.

"I see. Things have befallen as Atene and I foretold, have they not? 'Ere long the corpse of a new-crowned Khan of Kaloon,'" and he pointed to the gold circlet that Ayesha had set on Leo's brow, "'will lie upon the brink of the Pit of Flame'—as I foretold." An evil smile crept into his eyes, and he went on:

"Hadst thou not smote me dumb, I who watched could have warned thee that they would so befall; but, great mistress, it pleased thee to smite me dumb. And so it seems, O Hes, that thou hast overshot thyself and liest broken at the foot of that pinnacle which, step by step, thou hast climbed for more than two thousand weary years. See what thou hast bought at the price of countless lives that now before the throne of Judgment bring accusations against thy powers misused, and cry out for justice on thy head," and he looked at the dead form of Leo.

"I sorrow for them; yet, O Simbri, they were well spent," Ayesha answered, reflectively, "who, by their forewritten doom, as it was decreed, held thy knife from falling, and thus won

me my husband. Ay, and I am happy —happier than such blind bats as thou can see or guess. For, know that now with him I have re-wed my wandering soul divorced by sin from me, and that of our marriage kiss which burned his life away there shall still be born to us children of Forgiveness and eternal Grace, and all things that are pure and fair.

"Look thou, Simbri, I will honor thee. Thou shalt be my messenger, and, beware! beware, I say, how thou dost fulfill thine office, since of every syllable thou must render an account.

"Go thou down the dark paths of death, and, since even my thought may not reach to where he sleeps to-night, search out my lord and say to him that the feet of his spouse, Ayesha, are following fast. Bid him have no fear for me, who, by this last sorrow, have atoned my crimes and am in his embrace regenerate. Tell him that thus it was appointed, and thus is best, since now for him also mortality is left behind and true life begins. Command him that he awaits me in the Gate of Death. Thou hearest?"

"I hear, O Queen, Mighty-from-of-Old."

"One thing more. Say to Atene that I forgive her. Her heart was high, and greatly did she play her part. There, in the gates, we will balance our account. Thou hearest?"

"I hear, O Eternal Star that hath conquered Night."

"Then, man, *begone!*"

As the word left Ayesha's lips, Simbri leaped from the floor, grasping at the air, as though he would clutch his own departing soul, staggered back against the board where Leo and I had eaten, overthrowing it, and, amid a rain of gold and silver vessels, fell down and died.

She looked at him, then said to me:

"See, though he ever hated me, this magician, who has known Ayesha from the first, did homage to my ancient majesty at last, when lies and defiance would serve his end no more. No longer now do I hear the name that his dead mistress gave to me. The 'Star-that-hath-fallen' in his lips and in very truth is become the 'Star-which-hath-burst-the-bonds-of-Night,' and, rearisen, shines forever—shines with its twin immortal to set no more—my Holly. Well, he is gone, and, ere now, those that serve me in the Under-world—dost remember? —thou sawest their captains in the sanctuary—bend the head at great Ayesha's word and make her place ready near her spouse.

"But, oh, what folly has been mine! When even here my wrath can show such power, how could I hope that my lord would outlive the fires of my love? Still, it was better so, for he sought not the pomp I would have given him, nor desired the death of men. Yet such pomp must have been his portion in this poor shadow of a world, and the steps that encircle an usurper's throne are ever slippery with blood.

"Thou art weary, my Holly; go rest thee. To-morrow night we journey to the mountain, there to celebrate these obsequies."

I crept into the room adjoining—it had been Simbri's, and laid me down upon his bed, but to sleep I was not able. Its door was open, and in the light of the burning city that shone through the casements I could see Ayesha watching by her dead. Hour after hour she watched, her head resting on her hand, silent, stirless. She wept not, no sigh escaped her; only watched as a tender woman watches a slumbering babe, that she knows will awake at dawn.

Her face was unveiled, and I perceived that it had greatly changed. All pride and anger were departed from it; it was grown soft, wistful, yet full of confidence and quietness. For a while I could not think of what it reminded me, till suddenly I remembered. Now it was like, indeed the counterpart almost, of the holy and majestic semblance of the statue of the mother in the sanctuary. Yes, with just such a look of love and power as that mother cast upon her frightened child newrisen from its dream of death, did Ayesha gaze upon her dead, while her

parted lips also seemed to whisper "some tale of hope, sure and immortal."

At length she rose and came into my chamber.

"Thou thinkest me fallen and dost grieve for me, my Holly," she said, in a gentle voice, "knowing my fears lest some such fate should overtake my lord."

"Ay, Ayesha, I grieve for thee as for myself."

"Spare, then, thy pity, Holly, since although the human part of me would have kept him on the earth, now my spirit doth rejoice that for a while he has burst his mortal bonds. For many an age, although I knew it not, in my proud defiance of the universal law, I have fought against his true weal and mine. Thrice have I and the angel wrestled, matching strength with strength, and thrice has he conquered me. Yet as he bore away his prize this night he whispered wisdom in my ear. This was his message: That in death is love's home, in death its strength; that from the charnel house of life this love springs again glorified and pure, to reign a conqueror forever. Therefore I wipe away my tears and go to join him whom we have lost, there where he awaits me, as it is granted to me that I may do.

"But I am selfish, and forgot. Thou needest rest. Sleep, friend, I bid thee sleep."

And I slept.

When I awoke it was day, and through the window place I saw the rain that the people of Kaloon had so long desired falling in one straight sheet. I saw also that Ayesha, seated by the shrouded form of Leo, was giving orders to her priests and captains and to some nobles who had survived the slaughter of Kaloon as to the new government of the land. Then I slept again.

It evening, and Ayesha stood at my bedside.

"All is prepared," she said. "Arise and ride with me."

So we went, escorted by a thousand cavalry, for the rest stayed to occupy, or, perchance, to plunder, the land of Kaloon. In front the body of Leo was borne by relays of priests, and behind it rode the veiled Ayesha, I at her side.

Strange was the contrast between this departure and our arrival.

Then the rushing squadrons, the elements that raved, the perpetual sheen of lightnings seen through the swinging curtains of the hail; the voices of despair from an army rolled in blood beneath the chariot wheels of thunder.

Now the white-draped corpse, the slow-pacing horses, the riders with their spears reversed, and on either side, seen in that melancholy moonlight, the women of Kaloon burying their innumerable dead.

And Ayesha herself, yesterday a Valkyrie crested with the star of flame, today but a bereaved woman humbly following the body of her husband to the tomb.

Yet how they feared her! Some widow, standing on the grave mold she had dug, pointed as we passed to the body of Leo, uttering bitter words which I could not catch. Thereon her companions flung themselves upon her and, felling her with fist and spade, prostrated themselves upon the ground, throwing dust on their hair, in token of their submission to the queen of death.

Ayesha saw them, and said to me with something of her ancient fire and pride:

"I tread the plain of Kaloon no more, yet as a parting gift have I read this high-stomached people a lesson that they needed long. Not for many a generation, O Holly, will they dare to lift spear against the College of Hes and its subject tribes."

Again it was night, and where once lay that of the Khan, the man whom he had killed, flanked by the burning pillars, the bier of Leo stood in the inmost sanctuary, before the statue of the mother, whose gentle, unchanging eyes seemed to search his quiet face.

On her throne sat the veiled Hesea,

giving commands to her priests and priestesses.

"I am weary," she said, "and it may be that I leave you for a while to rest—beyond the mountains. A year, or a thousand years—I cannot say. If so, let Papave, with Oros as her counselor and husband and their seed, hold my place till I return again.

"Priests and priestesses of the College of Hes, over new territories have I held my hand; take them as an heritage from me, and rule them well and gently. Henceforth let the Hesea of the Mountain be also the Khania of Kaloon.

"Priests and priestesses of our ancient faith, learn to look through its rites and tokens, outward and visible, to the informing spirit. If Hes the goddess never ruled on earth, still pitying nature rules. If the name of Isis never rang through the courts of heaven, still in heaven, with all love fulfilled, nursing her human children on her breast, dwells the mighty motherhood whereof this statue is the symbol, that motherhood which bore us, and, unforgetting, faithful, will receive us at the end.

"For of the bread of bitterness we shall not always eat, of the water of tears we shall not always drink. Beyond the night the royal suns ride on; ever the rainbow shines around the rain. Though they slip from our clutching hands like melted snow, the lives we lose shall yet be found immortal, and from the burnt-out fires of our human hopes will spring a heavenly star."

She paused and waved her hand, as though to dismiss them, then added, by an afterthought, pointing to myself:

"This man is my beloved friend and guest. Let him be yours also. It is my will that you tend and guard him here, and when the snows have melted and summer is at hand, that you fashion a way for him through the gulf and bring him across the mountains by which he came, till you leave him in safety. Hear and forget not, for be sure that to me you shall give account of him."

The night drew toward the dawn, and we stood upon the peak above the gulf of fire, four of us only—Ayesha and I and Oros and Papave. For the bearers had laid down the body of Leo upon its edge and gone their way. The curtain of flame flared in front of us, its crest bent over like a billow in the gale, and to leeward, one by one, floated the torn-off clouds and pinnacles of fire. By the dead Leo knelt Ayesha, gazing at that icy, smiling face, but speaking no single word. At length she rose, and said:

"Darkness draws near, my Holly, that deep darkness which foreruns the glory of the dawn. Now fare thee well for one little hour. When thou art about to die, but not before, call me, and I will come to thee. Stir not and speak not till all be done, lest when I am no longer here to be thy guard some presence should pass on and slay thee.

"Think not that I am conquered, for now my name is victory! Think not that Ayesha's strength is spent or her tale is done, for of it thou knowest but a single page. Think not even that I am to-day that thing of sin and pride, the woman or the spirit thou didst adore and fear, I who, in my lord's love and sacrifice, have again conceived my soul. For know that now once more, as at the beginning, his soul and mine are *one*."

She thought a while and added:

"Friend, take this scepter in memory of me, but beware how thou usest it, save at the last to summon me, for it has virtues," and she gave me the jewelled sistrum that she bore—then said:

"So kiss his brow, stand back, and be still."

Now, as once before, the darkness gathered on the pit, and presently, although I heard no prayer, though now no mighty music broke upon the silence, through that darkness, beating up the gale, came the two-winged flame and hovered where Ayesha stood.

It appeared, it vanished, and one by one the long minutes crept away until the first spear of dawn lit upon the point of rock.

Lo! it was empty, utterly empty and lonesome. Gone was the corpse of Leo, and gone, too, was Ayesha the imperial, the divine.

Whither had she gone? I know not. But this I know, that as the light returned and the broad sheet of flame flared out to meet it, I seemed to see two glorious shapes sweeping upward on its bosom, and the faces that they wore were those of Leo and of Ayesha.

Often and often during the weary months that followed, while I wandered through the temple or amid the winter snows upon the mountainside, did I seek to solve this question—whither had She gone? I asked it of my heart; I asked it of the skies; I asked it of the spirit of Leo, which often was so near to me.

But no sure answer ever came, nor will I hazard one. As mystery wrapped Ayesha's origin and lives—for the truth of these things I never learned—so did mystery wrap her deaths, or, rather, her departings, for I cannot think her dead. Surely she still is, if not on earth, then in some other sphere?

So I believe; and when my own hour comes, and it draws near swiftly, I shall know whether I believe in vain, or whether she will appear to be my guide as, with her last words, she swore that she would do. Then, too, I shall learn what she was about to reveal to Leo when he died—the purposes of their being and of their love.

So I can wait in patience, who must not wait for long, though my heart is broken and I am desolate.

Oros and all the priests were very good to me. Indeed, even had it been their wish, they would have feared to be otherwise, who remembered and were sure that in some time to come they must render an account of this matter to their dread queen. By way of return, I helped them as I was best able to draw up a scheme for the government of the conquered country of Kaloon, and with my advice upon many other questions.

And so at length the long months wore away, till at the approach of summer the snows melted. Then I said that I must be gone. They gave me of their treasures in precious stones, lest I should need money for my faring, since the gold of which I had such plenty was, of course, too heavy to be carried by one man alone. They led me across the plains of Kaloon, where now the husbandmen, those that were left of them, plowed the land and scattered seed, and so on to its city. But amid those blackened ruins, over which Atene's palace still frowned unharmed, I would not enter, for to me it was, and always must remain, a home of death. So I camped outside the walls by the river just where Leo and I had landed after that poor, mad Khan set us free, or, rather, loosed us to be hunted by his death-hounds.

Next day we took boat and rowed up the river, past the place where we had seen Atene's cousin murdered, till we came to the gate house. Here once again I slept, or, rather, did not sleep.

On the following morning I went down into the ravine and found, to my surprise, that the rapid torrent—shallow enough now — had been roughly bridged, and that in preparation for my coming, rude but sufficient ladders were built on the face of the opposing precipice. At the foot of these I bade farewell to Oros, who, at our parting, smiled benignantly as on the day we met.

"We have seen strange things together," I said to him, not knowing what else to say.

"Very strange," he answered.

"At least, friend Oros," I went on, awkwardly enough, "events have shaped themselves to your advantage, for you inherit a royal mantle."

"I wrap myself in a mantle of borrowed royalty," he answered, with precision, "of which, doubtless, one day I shall be stripped."

"You mean that the great Hesea is not dead?"

"I mean that Hes never dies. She changes, that is all. As the wind blows now hence, now hither, so she comes and goes, and who can tell at what spot upon the earth, or beyond it, for a while that wind lies sleeping? But at sunset or at dawn, at noon or at midnight, it will begin to blow again, and

then woe to those who stand across its path.

"Remember the dead heaped upon the plains of Kaloon. Remember the departing of the Shaman Simbri, with his message and the words that she spoke then. Remember the passing of the Hesea from the mountain point. Stranger from the west, surely as tomorrow's sun must rise, as she went, so she will return again, and in my borrowed garment I await her advent."

"I also await her advent," I answered, and thus we parted.

Accompanied by fifty picked men bearing provisions and arms, I climbed the ladders easily enough, and now that I had food and shelter, crossed the mountains without mishap. They even escorted me through the desert beyond, till one night we camped within sight of the gigantic Buddha that sits before the monastery, gazing eternally across the sands and snows.

When I awoke next morning, the priests were gone. So I took up my pack and pursued my journey alone, and, walking slowly, came at sunset to the distant lamasery. At its door an ancient figure, wrapped in a tattered cloak, was sitting, engaged apparently in contemplation of the skies. It was our old friend Kou-en. Adjusting his horn spectacles on his nose, he looked at me.

"I was awaiting you, brother of the monastery called the world," he said, in a voice, measured, very ineffectually, to conceal his evident delight. "Have you grown hungry there that you return to this poor place?"

"Ay, most excellent Kou-en," I answered, "hungry for rest."

"It shall be yours for all the days of this incarnation. But say, where is the other brother?"

"Dead," I answered.

"And therefore reborn elsewhere. Well, doubtless we shall meet him later on. Come, eat, and afterward tell me your story."

So I ate, and that night I told him all. Kou-en listened with respectful attention, but the tale, strange as it might seem to most people, excited no particular wonder in his mind. Indeed, he explained it to me at such length, by aid of some marvelous theory of reincarnations, that at last I began to doze.

"At least," I said, sleepily, "it would seem that we are all winning merit on the everlasting plane," for I thought that favorite catchword would please him.

"Yes, brother of the monastery called the world," Kou-en answered, in a severe voice, "doubtless you are all winning merit, but, if I may venture to say so, you are winning it very slowly, especially the woman—or the sorceress—or the mighty evil spirit—whose names I understand you to tell me are She, Hes and Ayesha upon earth and in *Avitchi*, Star-that-hath-Fallen——"

(*Here Mr. Holly's manuscript ends, its outer sheets having been burned when he threw it onto the fire at his house in Cumberland.*)

THE END.

Romances of the Race Course

By Charles Steinfort Pearson

III.—THE BETTING COMMISSIONER

(*A Complete Story*)

ARTHUR REGNIER, "Arty" to the race-course people, "betting commissioner" for Hugh L. Markham, a wealthy owner, stood in the paddock holding a race program in front of his employer.

Arty had just returned from the betting ring with the odds which the bookmakers were offering against the chances of the horses in the next race. It was a feature event, and Markham's crack colt, Ducat, two years old, was a starter.

The owner was a tall man with strong face, long mustache and pointed Vandyke beard, brown in color. His complexion was swarthy, his expression impassive. He was somewhere between thirty and thirty-five.

Arty was a debonair youth of twenty-two, slim in figure, thin of face, with bright dark eyes, which showed the energy of the possessor. Though he was stylishly dressed, no one could have applied the title of "dude" to him.

A betting commissioner, it may be explained, is employed by an owner to place the bets on his horses with the bookmakers. It is a responsible position, requiring, as it does at times, the handling of much money.

Markham's eyes, roving up and down the list of blue-pencil figures opposite the names of the horses on the program, rested on a "3" opposite that of Ducat, designated as owned by the "Sapphire Stable." After Markham had contemplated the figure, with knitted brow, as if making a mental calculation, his face relaxed, he straightened up. Turning, he glanced at the chestnut colt in a nearby stall, showing every evidence of high equine life.

"I guess he's good enough to warrant my backing him for a stiff amount to-day," he remarked, quietly, and then in a lower tone he instructed Arty to place a large amount on the racer.

"The odds are better than I thought they would be," he added. "If he gets off well he should win. Get down all you can at threes, and the rest at the best obtainable."

With a snap of the jaws he stepped up to the stall where Arty's brother, Dick, considerably older than himself, trainer for the stable, was giving little Lomas, attired in blue jacket and cap, the "Sapphire colors," who was to ride Ducat, his final instructions.

The commissioner darted out of the paddock down the lane leading past the clubhouse lawn. It was nearly time for the bugle to call the horses to the post. As the young fellow reached the lower end of the lawn, some one called to him.

A pretty girl of about twenty, of a decided blond type, came down the lawn to the fence, leaving a group of companions. She smiled greeting at Regnier, who had stopped in his mad flight, hat in hand.

"I looked for you, Miss Daisy," he

This series began in the June issue. The back numbers can be obtained through any newsdealer. Price, ten cents each.

said. "The boss is putting down a good bunch on the colt to-day. His price is three to one."

In spite of the fact that Markham was dark, she exceedingly fair, the relationship between brother and sister could be traced in their features.

Arty was in love with her deeply—had been for years. Sometimes he dreamed—but pshaw! What right had he to dream, he thought, when the sister of his employer was concerned. She was most friendly with him, but she treated everyone with uniform kindness, he knew.

"What do you think of his chances, Arty?" she asked, lifting her eyes from the marked program she had been scanning. "My friends say Jamboree will win, and have bet on him."

It was the first time she ever had called him by his first name, and he was visibly embarrassed. Of course, it was due to the excitement of the occasion.

"My tip is Ducat, Miss Daisy," was his quick reply. "But you know how uncertain a horse race is. How much shall I put down for you?"

She unclasped a bag which she had dangling from her hand, and extracted two twenty-dollar bills.

"That's all I've got with me," she told him, spiritedly. "I am going on a little trip soon, and I need some extra money."

"I'll be glad to put down as much as you like," broke in Regnier, eagerly. "I'm pretty flush—and—and you can pay me back when you wish."

"No, thanks ever so much. You are very kind," she laughed, a little confusedly. "That will be sufficient. You know, brother is opposed to my ever betting on his horses."

Just then the bugle rang out, calling the horses to the post. Arty excused himself with:

"If I don't hurry, I won't get anything down," and hastened on his way to the betting ring.

Instead of plunging at once into the big ring, where the big bookmakers do business, and where no single bet of less than two dollars is taken—five dollars, in many instances—Arty continued to the lower end of the roofed-over inclosure, where the "dead line bookies," who take bets of one dollar, are found.

Stopping in front of a chunky, red-faced, good-humored looking Irishman, he asked:

"Will you give me Ducat as good as seven to two for forty, Callahan? You're always ready to take a chance, and it's for a lady."

"Aha! so it's for the ladies you're acthin' as commissioner now, is it, Arty, me bye?" was Callahan's grinning response. "Is it the pride av yer hear-r-rt you're makin' the bet fer? Whist, a wurrud in yer ear, now," he continued, drawing him over. "I'm thinkin' the colt will win this day, however they say he's a bad acther at the post. I know wan thing or two, if I am a dead wan, begorra. But bein' as it's you, Arty, an' I'm fairly loaded up wid the others, you're on."

He snatched the bills from the other's hand as he spoke. This arranged satisfactorily, Regnier began the serious business of the day, plunging headlong into the vortex of bettors in the big ring.

Big men twice the size of the commissioner were literally brushed aside by him, with grief, wrath and astonishment depicted on their faces, careening like ships before a gale at the impetuosity of his rushes. Small though he was, and slight, he was accustomed to betting-ring tactics. Pushing aside the big chaps, he dodged by them under their arms, upsetting them at times in his eagerness to reach the bookmakers. He was scolded, sworn at long and loudly, paying no attention, bobbing up unexpectedly in front of a "book" in which he wished to place a bet.

Beginning at the lower end of the front line, where, fortunately, one of the biggest bookmakers was located, he wedged his way by solid masses of perspiring men, holding up a finger to attract the layer's attention.

The eyes of this particular penciller, Harwood, everywhere at once, caught those of Arty. He turned his slate so that Regnier could have a good look at

it. The odds were still three against Ducat.

"Well, what is it, Arty?" Harwood bellowed, his voice carrying clear above the clamor of the place.

"As much as you want at that price," sang out Regnier.

"Two thousand!" yelled the "bookie," curtly.

No money was needed. Regnier, known as Markham's agent, could bet on credit, on "markers," in the language of the ring, and the owner was responsible.

Arty nodded, scribbled something on the back of his program, Harwood called out the name and amount to the "sheet writer," and that transaction was closed. In another moment the bookmaker had rubbed the three on his slate and substituted for it a 5-2.

Down the line again Arty scampered wildly, tramping on toes, butting into backs in regular "rough-house" fashion. For a short interval would he stop in front of each "book," and wherever he lingered the odds against Ducat were changed.

Sometimes he would hold up both hands, each finger and thumb representing a hundred dollars, signifying that he was asking the bookmaker if he would take a thousand. When, as happened often, the "bookie" would shake his head, down would drop a finger, until a nod showed the amount was accepted.

During these proceedings the betting commissioner had his following. Frenzied, seedy-looking fellows, with dollar bills stuck in the interstices between their fingers, would scramble after him in mad pursuit, shouting to one another:

"Ducat is the goods to-day, boys. Markham's commissioner is goin' down the line bettin' chunks of money big enough to stop a sewer," following the cry with a rush to place their small sums on the colt.

Finishing one side of the line, having visited the biggest bookmakers in it, Regnier halted and made a hasty calculation on his program. Only twelve hundred dollars remained to be placed. Hesitating for a second, as if uncertain whether again to plunge in the midst of the swirling caldron of humanity, he glanced at his watch, then muttered:

"No, I haven't the time. I wonder what Hungerford is offering."

Like a flash his fieldglasses were lifted and leveled across the ring at a man on a high stool, halfway down the line. The bookmaker still offered 5-2, two and a half to one against the colt.

Standing on tiptoe, waving his straw hat frantically in the air, Arty yelled out shrilly:

"Hungerford; hey, Hungerford!"

The bookmaker's sharp ears caught the call, his keen eyes saw the waving hat.

"How much, how much do you want? How much?" he bawled, putting his hands on each side of his mouth, megaphone fashion.

Arty shrieked the amount, repeated it twice, three times. Evidently Hungerford caught the last repetition. Plainly, too, he had nearly as much Ducat money as he cared for, as he studied a little, turned the slate, rubbed the 5-2 and changed it to 2. Looking over the bobbing heads of the crowd, he held out the slate so Arty, his glasses still leveled, could see.

Regnier dropped his glasses, lifted both hands, then two fingers of one, and nodded.

Almost before he had recorded the bet the stentorian tones of the announcer were heard, long drawn out:

"They're off-f-f!"

Hair scarcely rumpled, cuff unsoiled, the creases in his trousers as sharply defined as ever in spite of his strenuous experience, Regnier tore outside, past the grand stand, nor stopped until he had reached the fence dividing it from the clubhouse inclosure. Peering over the fence, he saw the girl standing excitedly watching the racers just coming into view.

Owing to the peculiar conformation of the course on which this race was being run, little could be seen of the contest but the last stages.

Quickly adjusting his glasses, after a

glance at the girl, Regnier caught the colors of the jockeys.

An exclamation burst from his lips as he saw the glimmer of the sapphire silk on Ducat.

The colt was running in fourth place.

"I'm afraid he's beaten. Oh! Lord, I'm afraid he's beaten!" he muttered. "The little girl's money's gone, and I hoped she'd win!"

As the crowd was yelling the name of the favorite, Jamboree, in the lead, acclaiming him already as the winner, with whip and spur, little Lomas, undismayed, urged Ducat on. By an almost superhuman burst of speed, while the crowd watched, silent and breathless, Ducat moved up, up, until at the very finish his head, with the yellow plaits of mane, was in front.

The cries, which had been for Jamboree, quickly were changed to ones for Ducat.

Regnier saw Daisy Markham, her pretty face flushed with pleasure, clapping her hands ecstatically. She seemed to be poking fun at a lady of somber countenance, probably one who had invested heavily in Jamboree's chances.

Glancing up, the girl spied Regnier. Running over to where he was standing, she extended her hand with the enthusiasm of a child.

"Oh! I'm so glad we won, Arty," she cried. "I'm so glad. I thought we would lose. Did you get my money down? If you didn't——"

She raised a finger archly and warningly.

"Don't worry," laughed Arty. "I not only placed it for you, but I got three and a half—better than anyone else," he declared, exultingly.

"That was very kind of you," she said, sweetly. Her eyes dropped, a sudden fit of shyness seemed to have overtaken her.

"I'm so glad we won—on brother's account," she said, and then continued, haltingly:

"I'm afraid he's been dabbling in stocks a little heavily, Mr. Regnier. He——" She broke off quickly, and held out her hand, saying, sweetly:

"Thank you so much. I'm going back to the city now. You can give me the winnings any time. Good-by!"

Arty found Markham up in the paddock, calmly scrutinizing the "cooling out" of his racer. The owner was one of that class of men who, while they may possess warm hearts, imagine, or seem to do so, that it is unmanly to display any sign of sentiment, thinking all that sort of thing should be left to women.

Markham affected not to notice Arty's presence at first, but after the young man had waited expectantly a little, the owner glanced at him, then back at the colt.

"I suppose you got the money all down, Arty?" he interrogated, carelessly.

"Yes, sir. I have the memorandum here on the back of my program. You can look at it."

Markham did not reply at first. Presently he took the memorandum, remarking:

"It was a pretty close shave, that, eh? I thought the cake was all dough for a time." Then his eyes took in the figures, and the "prices."

"That's very satisfactory, very satisfactory, Arty," he said, with unusual warmth.

He seemed more jubilant than Arty ever had seen him before. The young man realized that for some reason, and an accustomed thing for him, his employer needed ready cash.

Dick Regnier, a large man with a bold face, came up to them from the colt. Markham stated, with a chuckle, which was new to him:

"I think we've got the winner of the Maturity in our stable, Dick," and the trainer nodded, with a sly wink.

It was as Arty had suspected, that this race was in the nature of a trial for the Maturity, the biggest two-year-old race of the season. It was to take place some weeks later. This Maturity race was the first in which the young thoroughbreds would be required to go six furlongs. The one in which Ducat had shown his sterling quality was five-eighths of a mile.

Arty did not dare to give the win-

ning wager to Daisy Markham in person, for he would have felt embarrassed. Instead, he sent her the money, with a line or two of explanation. In return he received a note expressing deep gratitude, concluding with:

As you and I are such old friends and such good ones, I should not presume to offer you anything but thanks.

Markham's bonus to his betting commissioner for his cleverness and alertness in getting such good odds on Ducat, after the bets had been collected, was more than liberal. In spite of dictatorial, arbitrary ways, which Dick Regnier found hard to stand, and about which he was always complaining, the owner was most open-handed with all of his stable people.

The cheerfulness which Markham exhibited for a time after his colt had won disappeared altogether a little later. The lowering of his temperamental barometer, Arty figured, was coincident with the decline of certain stocks of which great things had been expected, but out of which the bottom had dropped completely and unexpectedly.

After the owner had left the stable one day, Arty heard his brother swearing to himself and muttering:

"If things go on this way I'll quit and leave the colt on his hands. He can't tell me what to do. He thinks he knows it all."

The trainer was entirely competent—none more so. As the younger brother knew, however, Dick's motto was "Everybody for himself," and if he had a grievance he would never rest until the score was paid. The companions with whom Dick associated, one or two in particular, were not those whom Arty fancied.

One of these was a trainer, much older than Dick, who had been on the verge of being ruled off the turf several times for questionable practices. His name was Standish, and he was nicknamed "Long-Shot" Standish, because he had trained a number of racers which had won at long odds.

One of Dick Regnier's hobbies was to own a string of racers of his own.

"I'll have 'em, too, you bet your life, Arty," Dick had said.

"If you keep on with Mr. Markham and do as well with salary and winnings as you have been, you can have them in a few years, Dick," Arty had suggested.

"In a few years," snorted the trainer. "Life's too short to wait that long. What I'm going to do is to get rich at one stroke at the expense of the 'bookies.' You watch me."

This talk took place only a short while after Markham and the trainer had their most violent disagreement. With his mind bent on revenge, Arty was aware that Dick would stop at nothing. He felt that Markham's chief aim in life at present was to win the Maturity race with Ducat. The owner had stated in the presence of the trainer and betting commissioner he would bet a large sum if the colt's form seemed to warrant it.

After the altercation, which threatened to end with the resignation of the trainer, things appeared on the surface to be going smoothly enough. Markham and Dick seemed to have forgotten their quarrel. The colt himself was in fine fettle.

To Arty's mind, Dick was altogether too suave and complacent. He feared that his brother was deceiving the owner in some way, for motives of his own, for never had the trainer been so willing to assent to everything that Markham suggested. Dick regarded himself in the light of a czar in stable affairs, previously brooking not the slightest interference from the owner. Now all was changed. It was very strange, Arty thought.

Soon afterward, when Markham was at the stable, Arty heard him say to the trainer, rather brusquely:

"I see by the paper that some chestnut colt has been burning up the track in the morning workouts. It was stated that the identity of the record breaker had not been ascertained fully, but a hint was thrown out that it was Ducat. If the clockers get on to the fact he's working so well, we won't be able to get any odds the day of the race, Regnier. It seems to me you might cover your tracks better."

Dick's cheeks flushed angrily, a scowl appeared on his face. The next instant he was smiling and saying:

"I'll cover 'em, all right, Mr. Markham. Don't have any fear in that regard."

For some time after Markham had gone, Dick chuckled to himself in a way which excited Arty's suspicion. Then the trainer's mood changed, and he coupled the owner's name with a fierce oath.

Later, Standish came over and had an earnest conversation with Dick. Arty overheard his brother repeat what Markham had said about the chestnut colt. They both burst into loud guffaws.

Standish had no horses of his own, but trained for a public stable—one to which any person could send a racer to be put in condition. Arty had no liking for him.

About a week before the Maturity race, Daisy Markham, who had been on a trip, returned home. It just happened that she ran across Arty. He did not attempt to force his presence upon her. Previously he had received the impression that Markham objected to their having association. Arty was too conscientious to try to steal a march on his employer.

No sooner had the girl spied him—she was speeding down the driveways near the Markham stable in her automobile—than she had the chauffeur stop and beckoned to the young man to come over. Arty responded with alacrity, his heart throbbing wildly at her unexpected appearance. "Jump in here with me," the girl told him. "I was just hoping I'd run across you, for I do so want to go down to the stable and see Ducat."

Regnier began to protest that he had an important business engagement elsewhere. She cut him off short with:

"That can wait. Now, don't be obstinate. Jump in!"

He obeyed with a feeling that he was not doing right. But seated by her side, listening to her prattle, hearing her charming laugh, he quickly forgot all about time, place and circumstances.

The stable came into view, the auto car puffed into the grounds and drew up to the Markham establishment. They were just in time to meet Markham himself, who had been inspecting the colt and was standing talking to the trainer.

The owner was visibly angry at the appearance of the couple, and looked searchingly from one to the other. Poor Daisy was terribly abashed at her brother's dark looks. Arty, in no wise to blame, climbed out of the car shamefacedly, his Eden vanished in an instant.

"I met Mr. Regnier on the road and I had him get in with me, so I could have a look at the colt, Hugh," the girl stammered.

Markham motioned to her to keep her seat.

"You know I don't approve of you visiting the stable," he said, coldly. "Still less do I countenance your riding down here with one of my employees."

Arty's cheeks reddened, then paled, and he started to reply hotly to Markham, but Daisy's appealing glance checked him. No more was said, and, after Markham had climbed into the auto, he directed the chauffeur without deigning to bid adieu to Dick or Arty. Dick Regnier seemed to enjoy Arty's discomfiture.

"Caught you trying to make love to his pretty sister, did he?" the trainer asked, tauntingly, grinning evilly at Arty. "The Regniers come from as good stock as the Markhams, if they haven't got so much money. Now you see what sort of a cheap skate he is, Arty," he broke out, passionately. "You leave it to me to get even with him. I intend to do it in a way he doesn't suspect, either!"

Arty said nothing, but at the time his heart was full of bitterness against Markham, more on the girl's account than his own. He even experienced a feeling of pleasure at his brother's statement that he would "get even." What had been done had been innocent enough, and the owner need not have been so cutting to either him or the girl.

At first thought he decided he would

see Markham and tell him that he would better get another commissioner. After his anger had subsided, he concluded he would wait until after the running of the Maturity before leaving Markham's employ.

At heart young Regnier was honest to a fault. So long as he was employed by the owner of Ducat he was resolved to be faithful to him in every respect. Moreover, from the hints which his brother Dick had dropped, Arty was certain that he would take advantage of the running of the Maturity race, in which Ducat was supposed to be a prime factor, to pay off old scores.

Aside from any conscientious scruples he possessed, the youth was well aware that any failure of Markham's plans to make the expected *coup* would not only rest heavily on the owner's shoulders, but that through him the sister would suffer.

For himself the betting commissioner took no thought, expecting, as he did, to leave Markham's employ immediately after the running of the big race. He was certain that the owner was hard pressed, financially. It was the young chap's resolve to help him out, no matter what had occurred, if he could do so.

Only once did he see the girl after the affair at the stable. She passed down the boulevard one afternoon with a female companion. For a moment their eyes met. Daisy looked at him steadily for a second, a faint smile on her lips, then her eyes dropped, a vivid blush swept over her face—then she had gone. Arty Regnier was left in a state of bewilderment.

Although he made it a point to try to discover the scheme which his brother contemplated working to ruin Markham, he could glean nothing except the fact that the trainer was seen with Standish most frequently.

Three evenings before the race was to take place, Arty returned to the cottage near the stable in which the brothers slept and kept their accouterments. It was only a two-roomed affair, a sort of bungalow, office in front, Dick's "den," with safe, a sleeping apartment in the rear, from which a door opened to the outside. A slight door was between the two rooms.

The younger Regnier had told his brother he was going to Manhattan Beach with some friends, and would not return until late. His friends had failed to appear, so Arty had come home early.

With no intention of eavesdropping the young man entered the bungalow through the back door, as quietly as possible, imagining that Dick already was asleep, or in bed. As the trainer found it necessary to be out at sunrise each day to supervise the early morning gallops of the racers in his charge, he was required to retire early.

Dick was not in bed now, Arty discovered. As he slipped into the room so easily his coming was not discovered to some occupants of the "den." Through the thin plank door Arty heard talking and laughing, the clink of glasses.

Two voices were distinguished at first, then a third, at irregular intervals, chiming in. Creeping noiselessly to the door, Arty listened a few seconds. The one doing the most talking was his brother, Standish joining in occasionally, the unknown speaking only in monosyllables.

"Here, take another drink," Arty caught the voice of his brother saying.

Silence for a moment, the rattle of glasses and again the voice of Dick Regnier:

"Well, boys, here's to our success Thursday, and the downfall of Markham."

"That rests with you, Regnier," was the response of Standish, followed by three laughs blended in one.

"Trust me for that, all right," responded Dick. "I guess Lomas knows who first got him wearing silk. What you want to do, Standish, when I get Ducat beaten, is to put your own over the home plate a winner."

"That's up to me, Dick, and I guess I know my business. I ain't called Long Shot for nothing. The way Pacemaker has been working the last few mornings, hang me if I don't believe he could beat Ducat without any of this

jiu-jitsu 'strong arm' business of Lomas at the start."

"We don't want to run any chances like that," interrupted the third voice, sharply.

Arty, puzzled for a moment, the next had recognized the owner of the voice. It was that of a bookmaker, Outram, who had several horses in training, mostly two-year-olds, the colt Pacemaker among them.

"I'm furnishing the money, boys, and we don't want to run any risk of seeing it burned up before our eyes," continued the speaker. "What you fellows are putting in to swamp the books with Pacemaker money is a drop in the bucket compared with me, understand? Regnier, put it up to this boy of yours, if he don't get a strangle hold on Ducat at the barrier, which will make him sulk the rest of the journey, you'll skin him alive.

"We all know that as the colt has such a soft mouth a little pressure at the start, which won't be noticed, will destroy his chances. In a sprint of six furlongs, like the Maturity, the horse that gets advantage at the rise of the barrier, if he has any speed at all, is the one that's most apt to cop the coin. That's my colt's strong hold—getting away good, and his rider knows his business."

More conversation followed, from which Arty was able to learn all that he wished to know regarding the contemplated *coup* by his brother, Standish and the bookmaker Outram, with Pacemaker. The colt, which was being trained by Standish, had been raced but three or four times, and had shown nothing—possibly his true "form" had been concealed by the wise Standish, for purposes of his own. At any rate, Pacemaker, from his secret trials, was regarded as the second best horse in the Maturity, a certain winner with Ducat's chances destroyed by his jockey.

The colts were not dissimilar in general appearance, as Arty remembered, both being chestnuts. He had learned to-night that the colt which had been mistaken for Ducat working such extraordinary trials, in reality was Pacemaker, smuggled into the Markham stable to fool the watchers about the track. The trio had jested over the deception, Arty listening intently to their unbosomings.

Furthermore, since the bookmaker's colt was not known to possess either speed or stamina, the conspirators naturally expected to get fully as much as twenty to one against that racer. They knew that Markham would wager a large sum on the chances of his own colt, as Dick had been telling him he could not lose; consequently the odds against the others in the race, especially any "outsiders," would be correspondingly lengthened.

It was all planned out with devilish cunning. They would allow the flood of money to pour in on Ducat and the others most fancied, no one imagining that Pacemaker would have a show of winning, when at the last the only three in the secret would plunge on the chances of their own representative.

With beating heart and contracted brow, Arty leaned against the door partition, listening to the men discussing their plans, scarcely daring to move. So cramped did he become from remaining in his strained position that when chairs were moved back from the table in the next room, and the men rose as if to leave, he almost toppled over on the floor in rising suddenly to get away. He did make a slight noise, and heard Standish ask, in a startled whisper:

"Isn't somebody in that back room, Dick? I thought I heard a noise."

"Nobody is in there. I guess that good liquor makes you hear things, Long Shot," laughed Dick.

Arty lost no time in hastening outside, as Standish made a further remark, something about: "That kid brother might be getting next."

Once safely outside, Arty ran a long way before pulling up to a walk, dodging behind stables and training quarters before he was sure he was not followed, his brain whirling with what he had learned.

Two things he understood most clearly. One was that his own brother intended to do a dishonest thing, be guilty of betraying a trust. The other

was that the girl he now realized for the first time he loved deeply, would be a victim, indirectly though it be, of that dishonesty. What to do to set things right he could not judge clearly just then.

For a couple of hours he tramped about in the night, covering several miles aimlessly, until, worn out physically, his brain numb, he returned unsteadily to the cottage.

Dick was asleep, or seemed to be so, when Arty lay down to rest, without disturbing him.

A sleepless night he passed, or practically a sleepless one, revolving in his mind some means by which he could save Markham. A dozen plans suggested themselves to him, but were dismissed quickly as not being practicable.

Toward morning he must have dropped into slumber, for when he came to himself Dick was gone, and the sun had been up some time.

On rising, the first thing Arty did was to look in the list of eligibles to the Maturity race to see if the colt Pacemaker was there. He found the name. The racer had not been withdrawn.

After a mouthful or two of breakfast, with an affectation of carelessness he did not feel, Arty "happened" over at the Standish stable. He found "Long Shot" himself there, and fancied the sharp, hoggish eyes of the trainer looked at him with covert suspicion.

"Hello! Is Dick over here, Mr. Standish?" he called out. "Somebody said he was here. I'm looking for him."

"I haven't seen him for a day or so," was the trainer's lying answer. "What's on your mind, Arty?"

"Oh, nothing. What have you got in your barn that's good? Anything that's capable of copping a selling race, even?" the young man inquired, teasingly.

Standish's suspicions were lulled by Arty's nonchalance, apparently.

"Not much," he grunted. "More two-year-olds than anything else. Two or three of them might do later in the season. Want to see 'em?"

Arty nodded, and the trainer led the way to the stables, and pointed out the different racers.

Finally Standish approached a stall in which Arty recognized the colt Pacemaker. The trainer's eyes were upon him keenly now, the commissioner felt, as he surveyed the colt, holding his head on one side critically.

"A little high in flesh, isn't he, Standish?" he inquired, casually. "If you'd work some of that flesh off of him he might do something along about Thanksgiving."

Arty heard the trainer chuckle.

"He's got a turn of speed, but I guess he does need some stiff gallops to make him ready for the races," declared "Long Shot," with an ill-concealed air of satisfaction.

The young man knew perfectly well that what Standish fondly imagined he had mistaken for fat was muscle. To Arty's really expert eyes the colt appeared a formidable opponent to Ducat. In the brief but comprehensive glance he realized that Pacemaker was "fit" in every respect.

A while longer he lingered, looking at a couple more colts. Having seen the one he desired to inspect, he sauntered off to find Dick, he told Standish.

His night of sleeplessness and the weight of the secret he carried made him look so haggard that the brother noticed it, and commented on it.

"What's the matter with you, Arty? You must have been out with the boys for fair last night," he said. "Or maybe you're lovesick over that white-faced Daisy Markham. I guess that's the truth of it."

Arty was silent.

"Well, if a girl's brother should throw me down the way he did you, like the dirt beneath his feet, I wouldn't lose much sleep over her," he said, with a sneer. "I bet she ain't losing any."

"I don't see what you've got against Markham," declared Arty, suddenly. "He's always treated you pretty well. I think you've got more than your salary and percentage."

"I wouldn't take up for him against my own brother—not after the way he treated you," snorted Dick.

Just then Markham himself put in an appearance. Dick apparently was all deference. For some minutes they stood conversing earnestly together outside the stall of the crack colt. Markham beckoned to Arty, who responded to the call.

"Thursday will be your busy day, I expect, Arty," the owner declared, pleasantly enough. "Dick says the colt is as good as they make 'em, and I'm going to back him to my limit."

The sum he mentioned was so large that Arty gasped at its immensity. Even Dick's sinister face showed astonishment. A moment later it wore an expression of duplicity which disgusted the brother, knowing its cause.

Markham's intention plainly was to stake his all on his colt, and win or lose everything. It was useless to appeal to Dick's generosity, Arty knew, the matter had gone so far. The thought of the sum which he hoped to win took away all sense of right in his mind. Little Lomas, the jockey, was so completely under the domination of the trainer that if Arty were to approach him on the subject of frustrating Dick's plan the boy would go straight to the trainer. He could not tell Markham what game was afoot, for whatever else he did, he would not ruin his brother.

Any suggestion of wrongdoing to the turf authorities would have the same effect. Besides, if this should be attempted before the race, nothing could be proven. Afterward it would be too late. Arty could not make a confidant of anyone—it was a problem to be solved by himself alone.

Next morning, the day before the race, he waited for the owner to appear. For some reason Markham failed to come, nor was he at the stable that afternoon. Just before supper time at the track young Regnier, who had waited anxiously for his employer, went straight to his house. Markham was out, he was told, but was expected soon. He would wait, Arty said, as it was something important.

Evidently Daisy had heard him asking for her brother, for she appeared suddenly. While her greeting was warm enough, her manner was constrained. She seemed greatly worried over something.

"You wish to see my brother about some stable matter, I presume, Mr. Regnier?" she asked, sweetly. "Please come inside. I expect him any moment."

She turned, as if to leave the room. Then she stopped, faced Arty and said, hurriedly:

"Mr. Regnier, do you think the colt will win to-morrow? You will do all you can to help him do so, will you not? You don't know what it will mean if he loses."

Bursting into tears, sobbing violently, she ran from the room.

Presently Arty heard Markham's voice, and the owner entered. The young man fancied the owner's face paled a trifle as he came forward, asking, with a shade of anxiety in his tone:

"Nothing wrong at the stable, I hope, Regnier?"

"Not a thing, Mr. Markham," was the reassuring reply. "The colt's as good as ever."

Markham appeared relieved.

"What can I do for you, Arty?" he inquired, dropping into a seat.

"I just wished to see you on a matter of business, Mr. Markham," the young man continued, hesitatingly.

"All right; here I am. Fire ahead," said the owner, good-naturedly.

"It's about the sum you want to bet, sir. Do you think you could let me have the cash to put down instead of using 'markers,' as usual?"

"What do you mean—that my credit isn't good any longer with the layers?" asked the owner, sternly, his face deepening into a frown.

"Nothing of the kind, Mr. Markham," replied Arty, quickly. "Don't imagine that, sir. You see, I figure it out this way: The bookies are a greedy lot, anyway. With a thousand-dollar bill waved in front of their eyes they'd be apt to give better odds and take it as quick as they would five hundred on a 'marker,' no matter whose it was. The feeling that they've got the

real stuff in hand they can't resist. A promise of candy to a baby isn't half as tempting as the candy itself."

Markham laughed heartily.

"I see no reason why you shouldn't have the cash. I have full confidence in you."

"Thank you, sir. Then, another thing. That's a big amount for me to get down. I'll have to get somebody to help me. The bookies know me as your commissioner, but they won't know the others, so the cash will be needed for them."

"All right, my boy. Dick has a safe in his office, hasn't he? Very well. I'll come down to-morrow some time after ten o'clock, so you can have it in the safe until needed."

They separated. On the morrow, the race day, Markham arrived at the track stable about eleven o'clock, with the money, which was mostly in thousand-dollar bills. When it had been placed in the safe, Markham rode away, with the parting admonition:

"Play it as soon as you can, for the papers all tip Ducat to-day, and the odds will drop from the opening of the betting. I'll be at the track with a party of friends later."

Dick was busy at the stable, so he knew nothing about the money affair. Arty locked the safe and left the track. About two o'clock he returned with three companions. Two of them were old friends, "clubhouse commissioners," whose honesty was undoubted, and who were under obligation to Arty. The third was a former jockey young Regnier had known for years, and who could be trusted implicitly.

With utmost secrecy he conferred with the three in a secluded spot. They listened open-mouthed to what he had to say. When he had finished they gave vent to loud expressions of astonishment.

"That's all I have to say to you, boys," he declared, at the end of his recital. "I'll tell you this much further: If you work for me for the fourth race to-day and take advantage of my tip, putting down some for yourselves, you'll be glad I told you. You'll get your percentage, of course. Not a word to anybody."

"And queer our game? I reckon not," one of them replied, and all swore to reveal nothing.

The former jockey was handed a wad of money, for which he gave receipt, to bet in poolrooms. Arty left the place with the other two, telling them to return just before the betting for the Maturity race would begin, when he would give them the remainder of the money to bet in the "ring." They had instructions simply to use their badge numbers for identification in betting, not using a name at all.

Arty slipped from the paddock, after the second race, to the cottage, narrowly escaping being found there by his brother. Dick stumbled into the office muttering to himself, and poured out a drink from a bottle. He already seemed half intoxicated, and stumbled out again, leaving the brother to breathe more freely. Of course Dick would have wondered why he was there at that time.

At the appointed hour his fellow commissioners slipped into the office, and were given, each one, half the cash. They had received full instructions, and nothing was needed but for them to lay it when the time arrived.

Arty himself remained a while longer at the cottage, which was inside the race-track grounds, but some distance from the grand-stand part.

It was just after the third race had been decided, and when the slates of the bookmakers were being covered with figures for the fourth race, the Maturity, in which Ducat was to run, that he left the cottage, and vanished until he had come to the betting ring, lingering on the outskirts a little before plunging into the mass of frenzied turf financiers.

Never, even in his experience with "betting-ring" crowds, had he seen such a jam in one before. It required all of his alertness and dexterity to pilot his way through the throng to the nearest bookmaker.

Breathless, he glanced at the slate. Of the fourteen starters, Ducat was favorite at four to one. Then his eyes

rested on the quotation opposite the name of Pacemaker. Twenty-five to one, he saw.

Two or three times he caught glimpses of his men fighting their way separately down the line, with the big bills in their hands, and watched them get the money down with professional interest. Then he would lose track of them, only to see them again in another part of the ring. He himself did not bet a penny.

Harwood saw him, and yelled something. The next instant the spot where Arty had been standing was occupied by another, and another, and another. Regnier had disappeared strangely, and the bookmaker did not see him again.

Ducat's odds had dropped to three, and still the public was fighting its way to the "books" to bet on him. Then a half point lower they descended. There they stopped. Reaching the next "book," Arty, unrecognized, drew a sharp breath.

There! Ducat's price had risen to three again, to seven, to twenty.

It was Pacemaker's odds which showed the most startling change.

When the cry of the announcer electrified the bettors, sweeping them from the betting ring to the lawn as by magic, to see the race now begun, Pacemaker was quoted at twelve, a drop of thirteen points from twenty-five.

It was impossible to see the horses until the race was half finished. As the fleet colts came down the stretch in the six-furlong dash, Arty looked in vain for the sapphire colors in the front flight. A chestnut colt with red and green rider, Pacemaker, the long shot of Standish, was the leader by an open length, going strong and steady. Ducat was in the middle of the bunch when Arty first saw them.

There they came past the field stand, and as they reached a point opposite the betting ring Arty caught the sheen of the sapphire satin on Ducat, creeping up, up.

Lomas appeared to have lost control of his mount entirely.

Arty felt a strange choking sensation —a deathly faintness.

"Good God—suppose that!" he muttered, weakly, putting his hands to his head as he watched the colt with the sapphire colors running away, with his jockey sitting still and inanimate to the finish, creeping up on Pacemaker, still leading gamely, the crowd yelling for "Ducat! Ducat!" with approving shouts.

A mist came before Arty Regnier's eyes; he could see no more; he was blinded by bright flashes which shot finish, creeping up on Pacemaker, still hear; yes, he was not rendered deaf by the unexpected occurrence, if he had been blinded temporarily.

A tumultuous roar boomed into his ears, like the sound of a stormy sea, dying down to a sullen murmur, as if gigantic waves had beaten against a rocky shore, and subsided.

The race was over.

Arty staggered blindly, his eyes opened and rested on the face of a man looking at him queerly. He clutched vaguely at his collar.

"What—horse—won?" he demanded of the man, faintly, blinking at the other as through a haze.

"I guess you're sick, young man," was the reply. "You were took about the time the leader reached the finish post. I guess you wasn't the only one that was made sick by it," the man stated, parenthically. "Pacemaker got the verdict. It was a close shave, I tell you. Another jump to go and Ducat would have beat him. If Lomas had——"

Regnier had heard sufficient. He found his way to the bar, and, though not a drinker, dashed off two glasses of brandy, one after the other.

Markham, face set and sullen, hopeless, looked vainly for his betting commissioner. A savage light shone in his eyes. His trainer, too, was missing, but he did not know that Dick Regnier, in a nearby café, was calculating his winnings on Pacemaker, along with Standish and Outram, and considering how much more they would have collected if the "ring" had not lowered the price so quickly.

It was after the last race had been run that Markham, running across one

of the biggest bookmakers there, and feigning nonchalance, remarked that the strong box of the "bookie" must groan with the weight of the owner's money.

"Why, how is that, Markham?" the layer asked. "None of your 'markers' came my way to-day."

Markham muttered something unintelligible. Another big layer twitted him with not having had sufficient confidence in his colt to back him. Then the savage light in the owner's eyes grew more pronounced.

Outside the grounds he saw Arty Regnier. The young man made no attempt to evade him. He did not know that Arty had been waiting to speak with him.

In a second the owner had reached his betting commissioner, hand upraised, spitting out the words fiercely:

"Your brother threw the race away, and you, whom I trusted more, robbed me. Where is my money, Regnier? All bet on Pacemaker?" he sneered, his face livid under the brown beard.

Arty slipped from his grasp, and, confronting the now furious, raging owner striving to do him bodily harm, began quietly:

"Mr. Markham, you will do yourself, as well as me, a favor, if you will listen to me calmly. I beg you to do this."

Something in Arty's quiet, protesting air of innocence checked Markham, and the young fellow continued:

"You were right, sir, when you intimated I had bet the money on Pacemaker."

Then, hurriedly, as Markham took a step toward him:

"But it was your money. I didn't forget that. The winnings also are yours. I have the badges here with the numbers under which the bets were made, the amounts with each bookmaker. You will collect every penny now."

Markham could not comprehend at first; he appeared bewildered by the sudden turn of affairs. Then the hopeless look disappeared, the color returned to his face.

"What the devil do you mean, Arty?" he asked, huskily.

"It's just as I told you, sir—every penny of your money went on the winner at the best odds procurable. I can't explain why I did this. I hope you'll forgive me, under the circumstances."

Still Markham did not seem to understand. He stood and gazed at the young man stupidly.

"You mean to say that you found out Pacemaker would win, probably, and bet on that colt for me to save me from ruin? That's what it would have meant if the money had gone on Ducat. I don't mind telling you, boy, I'd have gone to the wall sure. Did you do this to save me?" he asked again. Something very like moisture came in his eyes. His hand rested on Arty's shoulder.

"For you—and Miss Daisy," was Arty's response. Markham was silent a moment.

"I'm not going to ask you how you found out that my colt was intended to lose," he declared, continuing in a harsher tone. "It's on your account, too, understand that. I've known that Dick and Standish were thick here lately, and I saw how that race was run.

"I won't bring up this matter, for it would make too big a scandal all around, but, by Heaven! Dick Regnier had better keep out of my way.

"There's something else, Arty. I'm a hard man, but I've got a soft side, and it's for my sister. She's been moping here lately, and I believe it's because she wants you. Do you think you could make her as good a husband as you have me a betting commissioner?" he asked, part jestingly, more in sober earnest.

"You see, I was averse to her marrying anybody who had anything to do with racing," explained the owner. "That's the only reason why I discouraged her liking for you. I don't think you'll have any trouble in winning her, my boy, to tell you the honest truth."

It was only a short while afterward that the Sapphire Stable had two owners—Markham and his brother-in-law and former betting commissioner, Arthur Regnier, as the partnership was registered with the Jockey Club.

THE IMBECILE

By Andrew Comstock McKenzie

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE SADDLING OF THE WHITE MULE.

ENGINERO, fat and sleek from months of idling in alfalfa, pawed the pavement of the *patio* and looked comradeship through his bridle as Brian slammed on his cow saddle. Delicia had dragged to the doorway the saddlebags which she was packing; she did not want Phil out of her sight for one of these last minutes. Down among the huts José was mustering the peons. Already two of the best mules on the hacienda were prepared for a journey, one with a pack of provisions and blankets, the other saddled for Miguel, who was to go as Brian's servant, at the request of Delicia. Miguel had received his orders directly from the *Patróna;* he was to go with Phil throughout the world, serving him and guarding him.

Six sacks of gold were hidden among the blankets, and the mule grunted protests at the load. Brian had no idea the gold was there. He had gravely explained to Delicia that he could not take any of the treasure.

"It belongs to you, Delicia," he had insisted. "I cannot take any of it from you now. It would be like taking money from a woman."

Delicia had been puzzled and grieved. "But you need money," she had argued. Phil had stubbornly shaken his head, so she had given the six sacks to Miguel, with strict injunctions. Miguel had smiled brightly.

"I love the *Patrón,* too. I will bring him back, in sickness or in health. My life for his, *Patróna.* But he was a fool to go away because of a little priest."

"He does right," she replied, angry at once. "I, too, send him away. Who are you that you should question the acts of your master? Serve him well—for my sake, Miguel."

"Come, *padre,*" Brian called, resolutely, "the clouds are rising from the canyon, and it's time I was off." Let us go down to the peons and then to the trail. I ride to Quito by the way I first came."

Haggard of face and red of eyes, the *padre* came from his room. Delicia walked with Phil, holding to his hand, while the *cura* followed with bowed head—behind came Miguel, leading the mules. The peons were gathered submissively among the huts, showing no curiosity.

"I am going away for a while, O men and women of the Bleeding Heart!" said Brian. "It is an obligation, but I shall return. You know me as the *Patrón,* and the *Patrón* I shall return, rewarding or punishing. Meanwhile, the priest remains with Doña Delicia. You have heaven or hell as he wills, which thing you know well. I give it you strictly in charge that you obey in all things the orders of the *Patróna.* See that you tell nothing of the cleaning of the big ditch, neither at the hacienda below, when you go for *aguadiente,* nor at Machingui, where you will be sent each month for letters. It is also an order that you do no harm to the idiot, Diablo. In all things be good servants to the *Patróna.*"

"As you value paradise!" the *cura* added, loudly.

This serial began in the March number. The back numbers can be obtained through any newsdealer. Price, ten cents each.

"Or fear my return. Set them to work, José," declared Brian.

The peons scattered listlessly. Phil, Delicia and the priest walked on to the top of the canyon trail. At a word from Brian, Miguel led the mules down the path and disappeared below them. In days past, a former master of the hacienda, having fallen upon troublesome times, had balanced a great block of stone on the mountainside above the trail, so that slight effort would cause the stone to fall and block the trail to enemies. The smaller stones which had choked up the slab had crumbled, and the great rock now sagged back on the mountain. When the three had come to this place they stopped.

"Remember, *padre,* you are not to leave Delicia alone for even a day," Brian said, earnestly.

"On my soul's salvation, Philip."

"You must see that the Indians do not talk about the gold."

"What do we care about the gold, dearest?" Delicia said, impatiently.

"It might bring you undesirable neighbors," Brian explained. "But the peons will have small chance to talk. And another thing, have the idiot cared for properly. You need never see him. I hope you won't. But it is my honor that he dies a natural death."

"God speed his dying," murmured the *padre.*

Delicia was fighting the ache in her throat and said nothing.

"I shall go to Quito to size up the political situation," continued Brian. "If the government has been regulated, I can go down the line openly. I am going to tell Sam Adams the whole story. Then, as the railroad approaches Quito, you can count on his protection. There are a lot of good chaps among the engineers, and, *padre,* you must not hesitate to apply to them in an emergency. If the gold should be discovered, Sam Adams will surge up here and take care of your interests. But if everything remains quiet, you had better wait to ship it on the railroad. It is a comfort to think that you can count on an American or two at any time."

"Your friends shall be honored here, Felipe," broke in Delicia, eagerly.

"And you must write to me every week, Delicia, so that four letters start from Machingui each month. I shall write you, and Sam Adams will see you get the letters. Direct your letters to Adams, at Chimbo, who will forward them. I am going back to New York first. I could not bear to stay in sight of the mountains which hide you. I'd mean to be square, but——"

"If you should be sick, *querido?* May I not come to you then?" she pleaded.

"But I shall not be sick, save sick at heart. We are both tremendously healthy, so you must not imagine that either one of us is to be sick. You must keep well for me, dearest. The *padre* is going to teach you English. That will keep you busy; for it's a tough old language. You must study hard; for when I return I am going to take you at once to the States."

"I shall learn it well, so that you need never be ashamed of me," she told him.

They stood in silence, dreading what must come next. At last Brian braced himself. He held out his hand to the *padre* and said, simply: "And now, good-by, *padre.*"

The *padre* took Brian's hand; then, in the fashion of his people, he embraced Phil, kissed him on both cheeks, and fairly ran away.

"And now, Delicia——" he repeated.

She lay passive in his arms, save for her trembling. "I will be brave, Felipe. See, I am not crying." She lifted her beautiful face. "When you went away before, my love was young, and I was not sure, and I cried. But now you have been given to me for five months, and I know you love me. I am sure that I love you enough. So that we love each other enough, we shall be together again. But it is so hard to have you leave me! It hurts so to let you go!"

She kissed him passionately, flung open her arms and threw herself face down by the great stone.

"Go quickly, Felipe," she cried, brokenly, "that I may not see you go."

He stood over her for a moment, his

face working, his hands clinched. Then he stooped, touched her hair with the tips of his fingers and plunged down the trail in long strides. Not until she had quite lost sound of his footsteps did Delicia begin to sob.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE TERMINAL AT QUITO.

When a man rides in the Cordilleras with a revolver at his hip, a rifle under his knee and an armed servant behind him, he is treated courteously and past differences are overlooked. So Brian and his man found hospitality, instead of enmity, that night at the sugar cane mill of Don Ramón in the sweltering depths of the Guallabamba. Brian refused new *aguadiente,* but drank of the fresh cane juice as it ran from the rollers. Don Ramón had news from Quito. President Piño had resigned, and Congress had recalled ex-President Moncoyo, the little revolutionist who had invited the railroad builders to Ecuador.

Brian listened without comment. The change hastened his departure from the country, but, too, it made Delicia safer by giving a free hand to Sam Adams.

The next night they rode into Pomasqui, having climbed the far side of the canyon. Miguel was now in a new world, and his taste for travel increased. From Pomasqui the road ran wide and smooth to Quito, so that they clattered into the *patio* of Don Ricardo's house in time for the noon breakfast. At the sound of the mules, Julio ran onto the gallery from the dining room, his arms full of dishes. He could not see Phil, who was underneath the gallery, but Miguel smiled impudently up at him.

"What now, *chagro,* who rides into a gentleman's house without knocking?" Julio cried, pompously.

Miguel's white teeth gleamed in an unpleasant grin, and he fingered the haft of his machete.

"Possibly I come to teach manners to a *cholo,*" he retorted.

Julio, dancing with rage, dropped a platter, which, crashing in front of Enginero's nose, set the white mule to plunging.

"A beating for you, little monkey," observed Miguel, pointing to the fragments of the platter. The *muchacho* above tried to dispose of his plate so as to shake a fist at the Indian below. Failing in this, he spat at him. Brian, laughing quietly, spurred Enginero out into the *patio.*

"Nice manners you have, Julio," he called. *"Malcreado!* Is it thus you welcome your master's friends? Have you forgotten my greatness, of which you boasted when I lay ill at the *tambo* of Pomasqui?"

The *cholo* gave a howl of delight and bolted into the dining room with the news. It was Sam Adams who burst into the gallery.

"You old cuss!" he roared, and pounded down the gallery stairs, fairly pulling Brian from the saddle. "Where have you been? You had every camp on the line in mourning!"

Brian's heart grew lighter for the first time since he descended into the Guallabamba. He swung from his mule and staggered under the blow which Adams landed on his back. Again Miguel clutched his machete. He could not understand this queer jargon, but a blow needed no interpreter.

"Look out for my Indian, Sammy," protested Brian. "He's from the wild and woolly north, and he'll carve you in a moment. *Stami amigo viejo,* Miguel. How far's the track now?"

"Never mind the track. You come upstairs and gorge yourself. Lord, but the boys will be glad to hear the news!"

Don Ricardo had now come out and called down cheerily: "This is, indeed, a sight for diseased eyes, señor. This is what we call in New York an immense bully. Come up, come up! Julio shall show your *muchacho* concerning the mules. Julio, thou descendant of a *marcho!* Hasten!"

The two Americans came upstairs, Sam Adams' arm around Brian's shoulders. He was quietly studying Brian's grave face. "He's been hard hit, somehow," he thought, sorrowfully, but he asked no questions. Phil drank deeply

of the cool wine and made a better breakfast than for days. When they had come to pipes, with real English tobacco from sealed tins, Don Ricardo left them alone.

"Your story first," insisted Brian. "What brings you to Quito?"

"Chiefly you. I got fearfully worried at not getting a word from you for months. It was a dirty trick to play on an old chum."

"I'll explain all that later. How's the track?"

"The track is being laid a mile a day and will soon pass Guomote. Piño's out and Moncoyo's in. Moral suasion did the trick." He winked solemnly. "Just to give you a line on our progress, I'll confess I am in Quito partly to buy a site for our terminal station."

"Found what you want and can you get it?" asked Brian, who knew considerable of the opposition to the Chimborazo Central in Quito.

"Oh, I think so. We're hung up just now by a cantankerous old hen who owns a corner in the plaza we want to buy up. But Don Ricardo says he knows a way to put the screws on. He's a pretty slick article. It seems that this Guzman woman hasn't a clear title, anyway. Did you ever meet a little Greaser named Guzman up north?"

Brian's jaw set. "I did," he answered, grimly. "But I don't suppose he's your Guzman. The woods are full of them—like Smiths back home."

"Well, this Guzman was a bad egg. He had to get out of Quito. Possibly the cause was this old woman, his wife. She's certainly a tarantula. Her whiskers are a yard long, and she squints, smokes cigars and cusses. He gambled away most of his money, sold a little place he had at Cotocallo, raising ten thousand sucres, and skipped. But his wife hung onto the land in Quito, which we want. Don Ricardo has been investigating the thing and got hold of a drunken priest who used to practice up in Machingui, an isolated village, where a priest is a little king."

"What!" Brian leaned suddenly over the table, upsetting a bottle of wine. Adams stared back at him. "Go on!" Phil fairly shouted.

"Seems to interest you a lot! Well, this little Guzman struck north with his ten thousand sucres, meaning to buy a ranch up there. He met this rotten priest, and they got thick as thieves. They naturally would. It seemed that this priest had a ward, a girl who had inherited a big hacienda up there. The priest took Guzman's bunch of money and faked a marriage between his ward and Guzman, which let Guzman in for the girl's hacienda, the husband getting all the wife's property absolutely in this land of liberty. Of course there couldn't be any marriage, as Guzman's real wife is still alive, so I think we can worry him into giving us—— Say, old man, what's the matter with you? Take a drink. You look as if some one had put a knife into your back."

"Oh, shut up, can't you, Sam!" cried Brian. "Where's Don Ricardo? I must see him at once!"

"He's in the next room. But what in——"

Brian had sent his chair toppling against the wall and had slammed the door to the next room behind him. Adams puffed at his pipe patiently, while the murmur of voices came to him from behind the closed door. Don Ricardo's voice was suave; Brian's was peremptory and eager.

"I don't understand this game at all," mused Adams, shaking his head. "But you can bet your life I back Phil's play. I'll take five cards, for I don't know what to draw to. But Phil doesn't go off alone any more. Not with that look on his face."

An hour passed; then Adams heard Brian come out onto the gallery by another door and call sharply for Miguel. Miguel answered from the servants' quarters below, and Phil tramped downstairs. He was evidently giving orders, for his voice was curt and gruff.

"Si, Patrón. Bien, Patrón. Sta bien, amo mio." Miguel's voice was regretful. "It has been a short journey, *Patrón.*" Brian said something in a lower voice. *"Por Dios, Patrón!"* Miguel cried, joyfully. He swore cheerfully as

he ran into the back courtyard where the mules were tied. At the sound of the mules being led out, Adams jumped up resolutely and went onto the gallery to meet Brian, who was coming upstairs two steps at a time.

"Well?" asked the general manager, mildly.

Brian's face was white and calm, but his eyes flamed.

"Sam, I've ordered your mule saddled, too."

"That's right. I'm in. Where do we go?"

"I'll explain as we ride. Get your poncho and your gun. Take one blanket and tie it on behind your saddle. We can't bother with a pack mule."

"Right you are, sonny. I'll tell Don Ricardo we'll be back—when?"

"In a couple of weeks. And, Sam, you might say you'll have that terminal title all cleared up when you come back. Señora Guzman will be a sure enough widow."

"That will be nice. By the way, which direction do we ride? Not that I give a cuss, but just from idle curiosity."

"We ride north again. We can make Pomasqui to-night, if we ride hard." Phil was staring at the white peak of Cayambi, which glistened over the northern tiles of Quito. His stern face softened. "I—I have a claim up there, old man. And—and a snake I foolishly neglected to kill."

"Oh, glory!" murmured the general manager. "I see murder, battle and sudden death in his face. And something else that I'm not onto."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

AT THE END OF THE TRAIL.

They had ridden hard, and two of the mules climbed stiffly as the three riders came up the last great step of the Guallabamba Canyon to the platform on which was located the Hacienda of the Bleeding Heart. Enginero, however, had such pleasant memories of the alfalfa fields beyond the gap toward which he was stepping briskly that he led the others a good hundred yards. The general manager was not urging his own mule; for Phil had told him the whole story, and he planned it that Brian should first meet Delicia alone. Miguel, behind Adams, pointed to a great block of stone poised above the trail some distance ahead of them.

"The end of the journey, señor. The door to the Bleeding Heart."

"And the latchstring out," observed the general manager. "Here's where you and I rest a bit, *muchacho*. We mustn't show undignified haste in rushing up to be introduced. We'll let that impulsive young man get all hot and flustered, but we, ourselves, will put on a little more dog."

He dismounted gingerly, for the trail was narrow, the perpendicular mountain on the inside of five feet and a precipitous fall on the other. Phil, glancing back, appreciated the delay of the others and rode on all the faster, his heart beating wildly. So he came rapidly under the shadow of the great rock, which seemed to hover over the trail —then wrenched Enginero back with cruel bit.

The slab was moving. When Brian had last seen it, the great block had leaned well back on its crumbling foundations. Now it was poised straight up, so that it needed but a little more elevation to topple upon him. And, as Phil stared at it in his amazement, the stone seemed to rear itself still higher. Moreover, the stone appeared to have acquired a voice—a chuckling, gibbering voice. Then a grotesque face and a naked, shrunken chest came into view around the corner of the block which was now toppling to a fall upon Brian, who, stiff with horror, sat motionless on his white mule, while the idiot, straining at an iron bar which would give the stone the slight impetus it needed, peered down into his amazed face.

Something in Brian's startled gaze so pleased the idiot that he momentarily relaxed his straining at the bar, and the slab settled slightly upon the delicate poise which the idiot had given it by days of cunning labor. He threw back

his ugly head and burst into a peal of cackling laughter.

Brian awoke from his nightmare. His hand leaped to his holster. With a single swift movement his revolver swung in a graceful arc and dropped onto that repulsive face. The report came the same second.

The sides of the Guallabamba Canyon slammed an echo of the report from cliff to cliff and drew out long the quavering howl which came from the throat of the idiot. The giant stone crunched back on its support, but a hideous, half-naked man pitched down into the trail a yard in front of the nose of the startled Enginero. Frothing red, this figure scrambled to his knees. Brian rose in his stirrups, poising his revolver, his face red with rage.

"Take that for Delicia!" he roared. "And now, for me!"

Behind him Sam Adams was whooping as he and Miguel hastened up the steep trail. But Brian did not turn his head. The revolver dropped in a lazy curve.

But there was no second report. The idiot crumpled, rattling in his throat and pitched face down, his skinny fingers burrowing in the gravel as he died.

"Ah!" Brian said, coolly. "Got enough, have you?" He thrust his revolver into his holster.

Miguel, mountain bred, outstripped the general manager and scrambled by Enginero, at the very edge of the precipice. He stood over the body of the idiot, his machete raised, howling inarticulately in a frenzy of rage.

"Stop that!" commanded Brian. He got slowly from his saddle and looked down at the sprawling body of the idiot. Sam Adams pushed Enginero against the inner wall and crept by to join Brian.

"So that's the joker you were telling me about?' he asked, grimly. "A good thing it is, all around. Heavens, man, but I had a fright! I'll see that stone tipping in my dreams for months to come."

He stooped, seized one withered arm of the corpse and twitched it over on its back. There was a bullet hole just where the ribs branched. "A ve-ery nifty shot," he observed. "You had to be some hasty, too."

Brian heard the sound of a great commotion which was arising in the hidden hacienda above them. Women were screaming, men were shouting and dogs were yelping.

"Miguel," he said, sharply, "pitch that carrion over the cliff. She'll be here in a moment, and she must not see this. Be quick, now!"

"I'll help," remarked Adams, cheerfully. He picked up the feet while Miguel gripped the shoulders. Together they heaved the idiot's body far out into the great gulf below them.

Phil had turned the moment he saw that he had been obeyed. He ran up the rest of the slope and stood panting at the top of the trail. Adams watched him affectionately. He could see plainly the big American standing against the dark background of the rocks, the sunlight revealing the glory in his face as he held out his arms to some one whom the general manager could not yet see.

Then Brian's arms were filled. A girl had run into them and was kissing him, crying to him, laughing with him.

"The *Patróna,*" murmured Miguel, proudly.

"Turn around, you beggar," snapped the general manager. He grabbed the peon and whirled him about, so that they both faced down the trail.

"A ve-ery pretty view, my lad. One of the largest and deepest sceneries I ever noticed!" Adams said, loudly.

But Phil Brian was calling to him, so he wheeled about and saluted.

"Come up, old man," Brian was shouting. "I want you to meet my wife."

THE END.

BELOW THE DEAD LINE

By Scott Campbell

[NOTE.—When Inspector Byrnes commanded the New York Police Force he found it necessary to issue an order calling for the instant arrest of every crook found day or night in that part of the metropolis lying south of Fulton Street. This stringent order quickly gained for the district the title "Below the Dead Line," at least in police circles. As the lower part of the city contains Wall and Broad Streets and Maiden Lane, where the great diamond houses are located, various efforts were made by the "under world" to evade the order. For several years a number of crooks, headed by an unknown but extremely clever criminal, succeeded in operating in the district despite the police, and it is to chronicle their doings and their ultimate capture that Mr. Scott Campbell has written this interesting series of stories. Each story will be complete in itself.—THE EDITOR.]

XIX.—THE CASE OF THE BROAD STREET HOLD UP

(A Complete Story)

IT began with a fight between two men, as wicked a combat for upward of five minutes as one would wish to witness.

The combatants were a truckman named Coyle and a longshoreman, or stevedore, named Kelly, neither man weighing less than two hundred; and the battle waged by these two husky giants on the steps of the wide vestibule of a large office building in Broad Street one morning was one not easily checked.

Snarls and imprecations, the crash of heavy blows, the clamor of an excited crowd on the adjoining sidewalk and curbing, the scurrying thither of a throng of men and boys, who gathered like swarming bees at the scene of the sanguinary conflict — these were Mr. Felix Boyd's introduction to this case.

Following his customary duties below the dead line, Boyd was about crossing Broad Street, nearly within a stone's throw of the Stock Exchange, when the tumult fell upon his ears. As he ran toward the scene of the disturbance he caught sight of the Central Office man, Jimmie Coleman, hurrying down from Wall Street, and a second glance over his shoulder revealed two policemen just rounding the corner of Beaver Street, the first officers to put in an appearance since the fight began.

Upon reaching the outskirts of the crowd, Boyd saw, for the first time, the real nature of the trouble. Upon the broad flight of marble steps, then stained red with the blood of both, the two men were fighting like demons, raining blows upon one another that might have felled an ox, and plunging from side to side of the broad vestibule like oaks bowed by a cyclone. To come between them appeared to be all one's life would be worth, so frantic and ferocious was the combat, and the crowd in the street about the broad door of the deep corridor into which the vestibule entered hung back from venturing to interfere with anything more potent than shouts and cries of disapproval.

Though not at all in his ordinary line of duty, it was not in Boyd's nature to shrink from stopping such an affray. With an ugly light in his eyes, he saw Kelly land an upper cut on the jaw of

This series began in the February, 1904, issue. The back numbers can be secured through any newsdealer. Price, ten cents each.

the truckman, that lifted the latter squarely from his feet, and as Coyle fell crashing to the steps, Boyd violently forced his way through the crowd, at the same time crying sternly:

"Make room, here—room, I say! Will you let these ruffians batter each other to jelly? Give me room, you fellows!"

Thus he forced his way to the vestibule steps, up which he sprang, just as Coyle regained his feet and started in to renew the conflict. Boyd seized the burly truckman from behind, however, turning him roughly against the wall near by and commanding, sharply:

"Cut this out, you fellows! Stand away, there, stevedore, or——"

"You get out, yourself, or the same will be yours!" interrupted Kelly, fiercely thrusting Boyd aside. "Don't you mix in, mister, or you'll——"

"Leave them to us, Felix. They're more in our line."

The last came from Coleman, the Central Office man, as Boyd was pushed violently down the steps and among the crowd on the sidewalk. As he regained his balance he caught a glimpse of the two policemen dashing up the steps, then the gleam of a pair of steel twisters deftly twirled around one of Kelly's wrists, while Coleman and the other officer seized the burly truckman and quickly clapped him in irons.

Plainly enough the fight on the steps was ended, yet the case, as remarked in the opening, had but just begun. For, as Boyd elbowed himself from the throng on the sidewalk, he heard frantic cries from two young men at the open window of an office in the same building.

The office was one occupied by the firm of Gaston, Dill & Ranger, bankers and brokers, members of the Stock Exchange, and long included in Felix Boyd's list of clients. The several windows of their office were some eight feet above the sidewalk, there being basement offices below, and that at which the two young men had appeared was some thirty feet from the main entrance of the building and the vestibule in which the fight had occurred.

Nevertheless, Boyd quite plainly heard their frantic cries, as well as the mention of his own name, their voices rising shrill above the tumult in the street.

"Help! Robbery — thieves! Mr. Boyd! We've been robbed in here. We're locked in! Stop the man in a slouch hat! We've been robbed! We're locked in—locked in here, Mr. Boyd! Look out for a man in a slouch hat!"

Despite the general noise and confusion, Boyd quickly took in the meaning of their frantic cries and gestures. For a moment only he paused to glance sharply at the scene in the vestibule, with brows suddenly knit and eyes beginning to glow. Then he sprang up the steps again, seizing Coleman by the arm and shouting sharply to one of the policemen:

"Hold those two men, Ryan. Take them into the corridor and wait till I return. Don't remove them, mind you, till I give you the word. You follow me, Jimmie. This way—this way! There's something back of this scrap in the vestibule."

The last was to Coleman only, as they hastened into the broad corridor of the building and toward the office door of the firm mentioned. As they ran Boyd caught sight of the elevator some thirty feet away, just vanishing above the second floor. Through the iron grating of the car he caught only a momentary glimpse of the legs of a man, who appeared to be the only occupant of the car, and who Boyd then inferred was the man who habitually had charge of it.

His attention chiefly was claimed by two clerks excitedly gesticulating at the door of the banking firm, which was of heavy walnut, with a plate-glass window. Within was a small, square entry, separated from the main office by double swinging doors of much lighter construction, designed merely to mask the office from the gaze of persons in the corridor. The two clerks were violently shaking the outer door, having for several moments been striving vainly to make themselves heard by the people in the corridor, whose attention had

been entirely absorbed, however, by the disturbance in the street vestibule.

"That door is locked, Jimmie," shouted Boyd, as they approached. "I shall break the glass. A desperate game of some sort has just been played, and I must know of what it consists. Stand back, in there! Stand back beyond the swinging doors!"

With gestures more than words he made his intention manifest, and with the butt of his revolver, the two clerks having withdrawn as directed, Boyd shivered, with a single blow, the heavy plate window, the crash of breaking glass quickly bringing the throng at the street door toward the scene of this new disturbance.

Through the broken window, however, Boyd gave his entire attention to one of the clerks, by whom he was recognized, and who hurriedly cried, in great excitement:

"We've been robbed, Mr. Boyd! The whole office was held up by a man with a revolver. He has cleaned out the safe of cash and bonds, and has been gone barely a minute, locking this door after him and confining all hands inside."

"Which way did he go?" asked Boyd, sharply.

"That way—a man in black, with a heavy beard and a slouch hat. He escaped by the rear door of the building, perhaps, or——"

But Felix Boyd had swung around without waiting to hear more, and his frowning eyes fell upon a man in a gray cap and uniform, who was among the throng just come from the street door.

"Who are you—the elevator man?" he demanded, in a way that caused the other to catch his breath in his haste to reply:

"Yes, sir."

"What are you doing here? Did you just leave your car?"

"No, sir. I ran out to the street door when the fight began, and——"

"That's enough!" snapped Boyd, turning sharply to the clerk still at the office door. "What members of your firm are in there, young man?"

"None, sir," answered the clerk. "Mr. Gaston is at the Exchange, and Dill has gone to keep an appointment at the Astor House. Mr. Ranger went out to lunch about ten minutes ago, and only——"

But Boyd again interrupted:

"Telephone to Gaston at once and bring him over here. Ryan, hang on to those two men and bring them into this office as soon as Gaston comes with the key. I'll return presently. You, Jimmie, come with me. Watch the elevator while I am upstairs, and detain any man who comes down. Here, my man, are you the janitor?"

Much of this was shouted over his shoulder while Boyd and Coleman were running toward the elevator well and the main stairway. As they approached the latter a man came hurrying from the rear of the corridor, to whom Boyd's last question was curtly addressed.

"Yes, sir, I am."

"How long have you been out yonder, between here and the rear door?"

"Some time, sir. Nearly five minutes, I'd say."

"Has any man passed out of the building by that way?"

"Not while I was out there. I've been sweeping the rear steps——"

"That's all! Watch the elevator, Jimmie. I'll sing out to you from above a little later."

With the last hurriedly called out as he departed, Boyd started at the top of his speed up the stairs, mounting flight after flight three stairs at a stride and glancing sharply into each corridor through which he passed, until he arrived at the eighth and upper floor of the building. There, panting for breath, he discovered the elevator motionless and deserted at the closed door of the well.

All that had transpired as thus far depicted had occupied barely five minutes, and Boyd, flushed by his exertions and with an ominous fire in his dilated eyes, now shouted lustily down the deep shaft and bade Coleman have the elevator man lower the car, the lever of which Boyd was unable to reach

through the closed door, and join him on the top floor.

When Coleman came up he found Felix Boyd in a narrow offshoot of the corridor, seated on the lower round of a fixed ladder which led up to a scuttle, or trapdoor, opening upon the flat roof of the building. The scuttle was open and the midday sunlight was shed brightly down upon Boyd, who then was engaged in studying a twenty-dollar bank note, which he had found on the floor. His haste and excitement appeared to have abated, however, for he did not arise when Coleman approached, merely remarking:

"Ah, here you are, Jimmie. I've been waiting for you. Did you come up alone?"

"With the elevator man," replied Coleman. "He has gone down again with the car."

"I'd have sent it down to you if I had not found the door guarding the well securely closed. A curious fact, too, Jimmie, that is."

"Curious?"

"That a man in headlong flight after a robbery should have delayed to close both the elevator door and that guarding the well."

Coleman failed to see the real point, but asked, quickly:

"Do you think he came this way?"

"So it looks on the surface."

"And escaped by the way of the roof?"

"I found that scuttle slightly open," replied Boyd, with a rather quizzical smile. "Also this bank note on the floor back of the ladder."

"There's no doubt of it, then," Coleman growled. "The thief must have dropped it when hurriedly mounting the ladder. Why are you stopping here? Haven't you been up on the roof?"

"Not yet."

"The dickens, Felix!"

"I've been waiting for you."

"And possibly your delay has let the rascal escape. Why in thunder didn't you follow him to the roof? I never knew you to go lame at a time like this. If he——"

"We'll go up there now, Jimmie," interrupted Boyd, rising. "Perhaps you are right."

"There's a mighty small chance of finding our man now," frowned Coleman, as they climbed the ladder and reached the roof.

It still was damp after a rain of the previous night, and a sharp breeze was blowing. Yet the broad expanse of roof, which was somewhat higher than those of the neighboring buildings, presented only one object of interest, which immediately caught Coleman's eye. It was a length of stout line knotted securely around the base of a chimney, then running over the edge of the roof and down to that of the next building, some twelve feet below.

"There, you have it," cried Coleman, even more censoriously. "Your delay gave the scoundrel time to give you the slip. You must have been close upon his heels. The rascal went down this rope and through that scuttle on the roof below."

"By Jove! It does look so, Jimmie," admitted Boyd, a bit dryly.

"Look so!" echoed Coleman, with a growl of disgust. "Thunderation, Felix, it is so! The knave had his way of escape all prepared. It beat taking chances at the street doors, and he was lucky enough to find the elevator down and vacant."

"All owing to that fight," murmured Boyd, with a curious twinkle lurking in his clear, gray eyes.

"The devil take him, he may be a mile from here by this time," added Coleman, with obvious disapproval of Boyd's conduct. "No one in that building would have known of the robbery, nor have had any occasion to detain him. I'm blessed if I don't think you hung fire in this case, Felix, to say the least."

"We know so little of the robbery ourselves, Jimmie, that I think we'd better hasten back and get the facts," said Boyd. "There's yet a chance of landing the rascal. I want a word with those two ruffians in Ryan's keeping."

"Do you think that they——"

"Stop a bit, Jimmie. Notice the roof around this trapdoor. Very nearly dry,

eh? Yet on the floor below and just back of the ladder, Jimmie, where I found the crumpled bank note, you will see a considerable spot still damp from a slight leak at or near this corner of the scuttle. The water dripped down there during the rain of last night."

"Well, well; what has that to do with the case?" Coleman impatiently growled, as they descended the ladder. "What in thunder can you make out of that?"

"Merely that the owners of the building should repair the scuttle," laughed Boyd, quizzically, as they started for the elevator. "By the way, Jimmie, since I now think of it, leave me to handle this affair after we reach Gaston's office. Also kindly execute any instructions I possibly may give you. We yet may weave a net around our man."

There was that in Boyd's voice which caused the Central Office man to start slightly, then stare intently at the speaker's clean-cut, forceful face. He might as well have stared at the ceiling overhead.

II.

It was half-past twelve when the fight in the vestibule occurred, and only fifteen minutes had passed when Felix Boyd and his companion entered the handsome banking office of Gaston, Dill & Ranger. It consisted of two commodious rooms, one an elaborately furnished main office, in which the steel vault and the clerks' desks were located, the other an adjoining room used by the three members of the firm for a private office. There was but one entrance from the corridor, and to reach the private office it was necessary to pass the several desks and the wire grating inclosing the cashier's department and the vault—a condition of things which Boyd quickly saw was well adapted to so bold a robbery as that said to have been committed.

Though a throng of people then was in the adjoining corridor, the two policemen had excluded all strangers from the office, except the two men detained under Boyd's instructions, who then were sullenly seated in one corner. The several clerks and the members of the firm, however, all three of whom had arrived, still were excitedly discussing the affair.

One of them, the junior partner, turned abruptly to Boyd when the latter entered, and said, curtly, with some show of resentful derision:

"Well, well, Mr. Boyd, what do you say to this? I thought we paid you an annual fee to guard us against knavery of this sort. It's a high day in New York when a man, single-handed, can enter an office of this kind in broad daylight, hold up four clerks with his revolver while he loots the safe of a hundred thousand in cash and bonds, and then make off with no man to say him nay. A high day, Mr. Felix Boyd!"

"I believe your story, Ranger," admitted Boyd, without a change of countenance. "It is a high day."

"I wish to Heaven I had been here at the time! There now would be more money in our vault—or one less member of our firm!"

Mr. Burton Ranger looked quite capable of having ventured all that his resentful utterances implied. He was an athletic, well-built man of forty, with a strikingly forceful face, and a pair of eyes as coldly blue and penetrating as finely tempered needles. Plainly he was a man of superior nerve and courage, one whom few would care to seriously oppose, yet Boyd smiled indifferently at his outspoken disapproval.

"Better the loss of your money than your life, Ranger," he rejoined. "Besides, the money is not hopelessly lost. I yet may demonstrate for what I am paid an annual fee by Gaston, Dill & Ranger."

"Oh, is that so?" exclaimed Ranger, with a sharper stare. "You certainly display a confidence in yourself that I'd rather enjoy feeling for just a few minutes. The loss of close upon a hundred thousand is not to be smiled at, Mr. Boyd."

"So I think, Mr. Ranger, and if you'll now permit me to get at the facts in my own peculiar way and with as

little delay as possible, you will confer a favor upon me, and, perhaps, expedite the recovery of your stolen property."

The subtle sarcasm of the last took some of the wind out of Ranger's sails, and Mr. Gaston, the elderly senior partner, now hastened to interpose.

"Then you think there is a chance of recovering it, Mr. Boyd," he said, with eyes lighting. "I am glad to hear you say so. Command us in every way, I beg. We trust the case entirely to you."

"Root and branch," added Dill, approvingly. "If you cannot accomplish anything, Mr. Boyd, certainly no man of the regular force can."

"Thanks," said Boyd, tersely. "Now, let me get at the facts in my own way. Merely answer my questions, and do not bother me with advice and suggestions. No points that any of you will see are likely to escape me. How many are employed here, Mr. Gaston?"

"There are eight in all. Three in the firm, a cashier, two bookkeepers and two clerks."

"You were at the Exchange when the robbery was committed?"

"Yes."

"And you, Mr. Dill?"

"I went to the Astor House at twelve o'clock in response to a letter received this morning. The writer failed to keep the appointment he made in the letter, however, and I have just returned."

"Are you acquainted with the writer?"

"Yes."

"Have you still got the letter?"

"Here in my pocket."

"Let me see it," said Boyd, crisply.

"Humph! Did you notice that the signature is typewritten?"

"I did, but thought nothing of that. The letter states that the writer wished to consult me on a matter of business."

"In which case most men would have come to your place of business," declared Boyd, with a brusqueness characteristic of him at such times. "It's an even bet that the letter was sent by the thief, designed only to get you out of your office during his rascally visit. I'll hand it to you later."

"The dickens! I had not thought of that," cried Dill, as Boyd thrust the letter into his coat pocket.

"I think you remarked that you also were absent, Mr. Ranger. Were you called out by a missive of some sort?"

Ranger quickly shook his head, still frowning under Boyd's recent retort.

"Not at all," said he. "I went out to lunch about noon, and, incidentally, dropped into Benson's office just below here. While there I heard of the outrage committed here, and I at once returned."

"Quite naturally," nodded Boyd. "Where is your cashier, Mr. Gaston?"

"Mr. Calvin is our cashier. He always goes to lunch at twelve, and he is still absent."

"Had he been here at the time, the robber would have met with a much warmer reception," added Dill, confidently. "Calvin always keeps a loaded revolver in his desk, ready for just such an emergency. Unfortunately, none of the clerks could get at it while threatened by the rascal's weapon."

"Were these four clerks the only persons present when the desperado entered?"

"So I am told. Our head bookkeeper, Mr. Volney, will give you the particulars."

"Do so, Mr. Volney, as briefly as possible," said Boyd, turning to the man indicated.

"I can be brief enough," said Volney, drawing nearer. "There were but four of us here, each at his customary work, when the stranger entered. I heard the corridor door closed, then a moment passed before he came through the swinging doors. He must have delayed to lock the outer door, of which he had a key."

"No doubt," nodded Boyd. "He meant to exclude intruders until his job was done. Describe the man, Mr. Volney, and state just what he did."

"He was quite a powerful man, sir, with black hair and a heavy beard. He wore a slouch felt hat and a dark suit, with a sort of a reefer buttoned

close around him, and he carried a leather bag slung with a strap over his shoulder. At first sight I took him for some bank messenger, but when he approached my desk I quickly discovered my mistake."

"How so, Mr. Volney?"

"Because he suddenly drew a revolver, Mr. Boyd, and fiercely commanded all hands of us to fall back into yonder corner. The way he spoke, as well as his threatening manner, plainly showed that he meant business, and none of us had sand enough to resist."

"You did wisely, I think. The rascal certainly was desperate, or he would not have undertaken such a crime."

"We all thought so, sir. At all events, we retreated into the corner yonder, while the ruffian threatened to shoot the first man who uttered a cry or made a move to oppose him. Then, constantly keeping us covered with his weapon, he backed beyond these desks until he reached the safe and the cashier's drawer, the contents of which, or such as he wanted, he quickly transferred to his leather bag."

"Did he work rapidly?"

"Very."

"Like a man familiar with the interior of a safe or vault?"

"Decidedly so, Mr. Boyd."

"Are you quite sure as to the amount of your loss, Mr. Gaston?"

"Very sure," bowed the banker. "We had an unusually large amount of bonds in the safe, and our loss cannot be less than a hundred thousand."

"Go on, Mr. Volney," said Boyd, with a subtle gleam in the depths of his keen, gray eyes. "What did the thief do next?"

"He was here less than five minutes, Mr. Boyd," continued Volney. "Having closed his bag, he came out this way, with the revolver still in his hand, and held open the swinging doors to watch us while he unlocked the outer door and removed the key. Then he turned quickly, yet with the utmost coolness, and within a second I heard the outer door closed and locked. We then rushed to the door and windows to give the alarm."

"He was well away with his plunder," replied Boyd, with a significant nod. "And all the while that fight in the vestibule was absorbing the attention of everybody in the adjoining corridor and on the street. Very clever. Very clever, indeed! Of course you see the point, gentlemen. It was a very craftily planned job and very boldly executed."

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Dill. "You don't suspect that yonder ruffians had a hand in it?"

"Don't I?" cried Boyd, wheeling abruptly to the two men still in charge of the policemen. "Just wait, Mr. Dill, and see."

Both Coyle and Kelly were darkly scowling now, and the latter snarled resentfully, as Boyd approached:

"Well, we didn't have any hand in it, for all 'twas so clever. We knew nothing about any robbery till brought in here."

"Oh! is that so?" exclaimed Boyd, derisively. "So you would have me believe that a stevedore from the water front and a truckman whose vocation should have kept him elsewhere, came up here to the vestibule of a Broad Street office building to engage in the bloody affray that I witnessed. Don't imagine that that will go down with me, my men. I'm over seven."

"Seven or seventy, it's all the same," protested Kelly. "We know nothing about the job done here."

"That's on the level, sir, we don't," added Coyle, with a grim shake of his battered head.

"Is that all you have to say here and now?" demanded Boyd.

"That's all, mister. If you think us wise to this thieving job, you're dead wrong."

Boyd turned quickly to the waiting officers, and his voice took on a ring that brought a change of color to the cheeks of both sullen ruffians.

"Away with them, Ryan," he cried. "Lodge them in jail, and make sure they are held till I can run down their confederate. We'll see if a month or

two behind prison bars will open their mouths."

The threat had precisely the effect that Boyd anticipated. Both men glanced quickly at one another, involuntarily betraying some secret understanding, and Kelly then vehemently declared, with a snarl of resentment:

"Oh! come, now, we'll not stand for that. We can't be held for anything but assault. We know nothing of this job."

"Cannot be held, eh?" echoed Boyd, sternly. "You'll find that you can, and that I mean what I say. Take them away, Ryan. I'll bandy no more words with them. Let the district attorney worm the truth out of them before a judge and jury."

"Hold on! Stop a bit!" protested Kelly, as Ryan roughly yanked him from his chair. "I'm not going to be held for a month—not for a dirty hundred-dollar note. I've got a family to feed. I'll blow the whole business before I'll leave them in the lurch."

"That's right, too, Kelly," nodded Coyle, now willing enough to explain. "We didn't agree to do time. We wasn't let into this thieving job."

"So, so," cried Boyd. "Then you did agree to something. Out with it, one of you, and let's know what it was."

"Go on, Kelly," muttered Coyle, sullenly. "It's a case of must."

"'Twas like this, then," explained Kelly, less reluctantly. "We were paid a hundred dollars each to put up the fight you saw out yonder."

"Paid by whom? Come, come, the whole business!"

"A man we didn't know engaged us to do it, planking down the money in advance and making it plain enough that we could be pulled only for the scrap and given a small fine. He said for us to begin the fight at just quarter-past twelve to-day, not saying why he wanted it done, and we didn't guess the reason. All we agreed to do was to put up a game battle, the same as if 'twas on the dead level, and I reckon we did it."

"I think you did. You certainly look it," admitted Boyd, with a faint smile.

"It looked like a hundred easily earned," put in Coyle; "and I'll take an oath that's all we know of the man or of this dirty business."

"I was aware of that before you explained," Boyd now dryly remarked, much to the surprise of his hearers. "No confederates of the rascal who committed this robbery would thus have diverted attention from his knavish work. They would have foreseen at once that they must invite immediate suspicion."

"That's right, sir," nodded Coyle. "We had no idea why the man wanted us to put up the fight. 'Twas his money that led us to do it."

"When did you see this man?"

"Last night, sir. In a saloon on Third Avenue."

"Describe him."

"He was a fairly big man, sir, along about fifty, I'd say. He had reddish hair and whiskers——"

"That's sufficient," Boyd curtly interrupted. "We now have a black-bearded man and one with red whiskers. If we keep on we may have hair and whiskers of every hue in the rainbow—but always on one and the same man. Take these fellows away, Ryan, and charge them only with assault. See that the limit of fine is imposed, however, for their having engaged in such needless butchery. Take them away at once. I want no more of them."

"Then you believe their cock-and-bull story, do you, Mr. Boyd?" demanded Ranger, as the two men were hustled from the office. "I'm blessed if I am quite inclined to swallow it."

"You are not obliged to swallow it, Ranger," rejoined Boyd, pleasantly enough. "Yet for the reasons stated I expected some such disclosure before it was made."

"You did, eh?" queried Ranger, incredulously.

"Exactly," nodded Boyd. "And now, gentlemen, if you members of the firm will accompany me to your private office, I will give you the precise measure of this case and state what remains to be done. Come with us, Jimmie.

I shall want your help, with one or two besides, a little later."

The Central Office man was indescribably puzzled, yet he could not doubt that Felix Boyd had formed a theory to fit the curious case.

III.

When seated in the private office, the door of which he had closed, the expression of Boyd's face in no way reflected what he had in mind. He still appeared, in fact, to be seriously probing the matter, much as if he had not yet reached bottom. Yet he at once said, gravely, with a glance at each of the firm:

"I regret, gentlemen, that I was unable to anticipate and prevent the crime of this morning. Yet the peculiar character and exceeding boldness of it are much out of the ordinary, which is my only excuse. I yet hope, however, to be able to apprehend the criminal and recover your property, thus earning the fee you annually pay for my services."

"Oh! drop that, Boyd," growled Ranger, frowningly. "I intended to cast no slur upon your vigilance or your ability."

Boyd now laughed lightly, and nodded pleasantly at the junior partner.

"Very good, Ranger," said he. "I'll take you at your word, and now we'll get down to more important business. In a nutshell I will tell you of what this case consists, and show you what remains to be done. Your ears, gentlemen!"

Jimmie Coleman drew forward in his chair. For his life he could not have told what Boyd had discovered, nor have formed for himself other than a most superficial theory of the crime.

"To begin with," said Boyd, impressively, "this robbery was planned and committed by one man, a man who had made himself familiar with your office and with the daily habits of its inmates. He had provided himself with a key of the office. He knew that your cashier, the only man who could oppose him with a ready weapon, went to lunch at twelve o'clock. He sent the letter taking Mr. Dill to the Astor House at that hour, and knew, also, that Mr. Gaston then would be at the Exchange. Doubtless, too, he saw that Mr. Ranger departed about noon, leaving only the four clerks in the office. Under no other conditions would any sane man have attempted this robbery. Yet under these conditions, gentlemen, the general arrangement of your office made the attempt a tolerably safe and promising one."

"It strikes me that you are jumping at conclusions," remarked Ranger, with a doubtful shake of his well-poised head. "What man can thus have become familiar with our office?"

"That remains to be discovered," replied Boyd. "The unknown robber conclusively proved the deductions mentioned, however, by the celerity with which he committed the crime. I have stated them only for a beginning. Now to go a step further. He also arranged for the fight in the vestibule, that general attention might be diverted from this office while he was at work. Once in here with the outer door locked, with your office masked by the swinging doors from observation from outside, and with your clerks intimidated by his revolver, the robbery was a comparatively easy job for any man of superior nerve and determination."

"It's easy enough to say so."

"Follow me a little further, gentlemen," continued Boyd, not heeding the observation from Ranger. "Having thus prepared for the robbery, the man also prepared an avenue of escape—or pretended to do so."

"Pretended to do so!" echoed Ranger, with a curious light in his coldly blue eyes. "What do you mean by that, Mr. Boyd?"

"Just what I say," smiled Boyd, with a glance at his questioner. "He attached a rope to one of the chimneys on the roof, by which one might descend to that of the adjoining building and avail himself of a roof scuttle there, providing it was not locked or bolted within. But our man had no intention, gentlemen, of using that avenue of escape. He prepared it only to create

an impression that he had done so, thus to divert suspicion from his actual movements after the crime."

"Goodness!" muttered Coleman, with a start. "Do you mean to say, Felix, that the rascal did not flee to the roof?"

"Exactly, Jimmie."

"But how did you get at that? You found a bank note evidently dropped by him when he went up the ladder from the top floor of this building."

"So I did, Jimmie," nodded Boyd. "Yet you will remember that, when on the roof, I called your attention to the fact that the rain of last night had dried away near the scuttle, also to a leak near the latter through which the rain had dripped down upon the floor back of the ladder."

"Well?"

"Jimmie, the floor back of the ladder was also nearly dry, but the bank note I found there still was quite—wet!"

"Oh, the devil!"

"Therefore it must have been dropped there yesterday, with a very obvious design, or it could not have been wet with the drippings from last night's rain."

"Felix, I'm an ass!"

"Not so, Jimmie, for I did not disclose, upstairs, that the bank note was wet," laughed Boyd. "Yet I was at once convinced by it that the robber did not flee to the roof, and that the evidence up there was prepared only for a blind. This was further substantiated by the fact that the door of the elevator, which I found at the top floor, was closed, as well as that guarding the shaft. Plainly enough, Jimmie, our man left the elevator at one of the lower floors, yet let the closed car run to the top one."

"By Jove, you're right!"

"Furthermore," added Boyd, confidently, "since he thus could plan and promptly execute his every design, and also wished to convey the impression that he had fled from the building, it is a perfectly safe assumption that the rascal remained in the building, and, in one disguise or another, occupies an office here, presumably rented merely to enable him to commit this robbery. To find the office and the man—that, gentlemen, is the work before us. Find them and we shall find your stolen property."

"Dear me!" exclaimed Gaston, dubiously shaking his head. "I am helplessly confused by all you have stated, Mr. Boyd. What do you advise doing?"

"Whatever is done must be done promptly," replied Boyd, rising. "I want a couple with me in case of violent resistance, and I now will undertake to find the office and the man. You, Jimmie——"

"I'll also go with you," interrupted Ranger, starting to his feet. "Yet I'm blessed if I can see how you are to locate the right office, even if your theory has feet to stand on. There are more than a hundred offices in this building."

"If there were a thousand it would make no difference to me," declared Boyd, striding toward the door. "Come with me, Jimmie, you and Mr. Ranger. You, Mr. Gaston, disclose nothing that I have imparted, but remain here with Mr. Dill till we return."

In the corridor Coleman was sent to bring the janitor, while Boyd and Ranger waited near the elevator door.

"Have you any suspicion as to the identity of the thief?" casually inquired the latter.

"Not the slightest," replied Boyd, indifferently. "I now am out to discover that."

"I haven't much hope that you will succeed," laughed Ranger.

"We shall see, sir. Ah, here is our man. You found him quickly, Jimmie. Janitor, what is your name?"

"Tom Denny, sir," replied the man, respectfully.

"Is it your duty, Mr. Denny, to be familiar with the tenants of all the offices in this building?"

"Yes, sir, it is. I know most of them by name, sir, at least."

"And when they come and go?"

"Yes, sir."

"Most of the offices are occupied by more than one person, clerks and the like, are they not?"

"Nearly all, sir."

"I wish to learn how many are rented by a man who employs no help."

"There's not more than a half-dozen, sir," said Denny, promptly. "There is Mr. Rand, the architect, and——"

"Stop a bit," interposed Boyd. "Is there one who rented his office quite recently, say within a week or two?"

"There are two, sir," replied Denny, readily. "Mr. Gilley, in 81, came last Tuesday. One of the rear offices, I think it's 39, was rented by a Mr. Kibby ten days ago."

"What is Gilley's business?"

"He's agent for an oil company."

"A large man or small?"

"Small, sir," laughed Denny, wondering at all this. "He'd not weigh above a hundred and ten."

"Featherweight class," laughed Boyd, with a glance at Ranger. "How about Kibby?"

"Oh, he's good size, sir," cried Denny. "A brown-whiskered man, he is. I saw him here yesterday——"

"That's enough," said Boyd, curtly. "More whiskers, Jimmie, and of still another hue. Take us up to Kibby's office, Mr. Denny."

As they approached the office mentioned, Felix Boyd appeared to grow singularly excited. His brows were knit, his eyes aglow, his fingers working nervously. He had for none of his companions so much as a glance, and he forbade their speaking as they mounted the third flight of stairs and drew nearer the office door, which opened off a rear corridor and just beyond the wall of the elevator shaft.

"Handy! handy, Jimmie!" he tersely muttered, with suppressed vehemence. "To leave the elevator and slip into that office was the move of a moment. Nor any danger of observation in dodging around the well corner. Ha! has the bird flown? Are we too late?"

The last came with an ugly growl from between his teeth. He had tried the office door and found it locked. Then he whipped out a ring of slender keys from his pocket, and Ranger ventured to whisper, in accents of protest:

"You're not going in there, are you?"

"Yes!" Boyd did not look up.

"But you have no license to do so. You're not yet sure this tenant is the man you want. You're taking long chances."

"It's not the first time," snapped Boyd, on his knee at the office door. "I'll hazard his being our man. I've eliminated all the probable tenants. The job was done single-handed. He must have had an office here, yet not for long; not longer than his preparations required. I'll chance his being our man. Ha! now we're in!"

With one of his keys he had shot the bolt and then thrown open the office door.

"I say, sir, this is not quite——" began the janitor.

"You stand back and don't meddle," interrupted Boyd.

With which, more grim, frowning and excitable than ever, he rudely thrust Denny aside and strode into the office.

It was meagerly furnished—a table desk, three chairs, a stand with an open typewriter on it, a portable wardrobe closet in one corner, were the chief articles. A single rear window looked out into a narrow court leading out into Broad Street. A door in one of the side walls indicated, at first sight, a connection with the adjoining office.

Boyd's suppressed excitement became more obvious from the moment they entered.

"Close that door, Jimmie, and lock it," he cried, without a glance at his observers.

While Coleman hastened to comply, Boyd darted to the typewriter, caught up and inserted a sheet of blank paper, then rapidly struck off an imprint of each letter on the keyboard. As if too absorbed to heed them, yet constantly exhibiting an energy and eagerness well calculated to stimulate the nervous excitement of his companions, Boyd next spread the printed sheet beside the letter received that morning by Mr. Dill, and with a lens which he whipped out of his pocket he fell to studying the corresponding letters on the two pages.

"Aha! aha! I knew I was right—I

knew I was right!" he presently cried, with intense rapidity. "Look here, Jimmie, see for yourself. Here's the same flaw in the smaller of both imprints, a fleck of dirt in the loop of every e, an obscurity in every a on both pages. Dill's letter was written with this machine. That settles it—I knew I was right! The tenant of this office is the man we want."

Boyd had hastened to the desk, of which he was opening drawer after drawer with augmented hurry and excitement. Not until he opened the lower one and the last, however, did he find anything to his fancy. Then from under a batch of papers he snatched out a false wig and beard of reddish hue, which he quickly tossed upon the floor.

"There's one of them, Jimmie; one of his several disguises," he cried, shrilly, leaping to his feet. "Just as I thought. There's more to follow. See what that wardrobe contains—no, let me! let me! Ha! the slouch hat and reefer mentioned by Volney. The coat in which he did the job. He came here to change his garments and then went out. A trick to indicate that he was out of the building. I now see——"

"But what——" began Ranger, huskily.

"Don't bother me with questions—not now! not now!" snapped Boyd, with his glowing eyes searching every nook and corner of the room. "He cannot have taken the stuff with him. He'd not have ventured that. He must have concealed——"

"Good God!" exclaimed Ranger, derisively. "You don't expect to find the stolen bonds here, do you?"

"Surely! Why not? Of course!" cried Boyd, with increasing zeal and zest. "He'd not have carried them out at once. A needless hazard. No occasion for that. He might have been nabbed in leaving and found with them on him. Better conceal them here till later, and then—ha! the floor!"

Down upon his knees he went, to Coleman's utter amazement and perplexity over his conduct, and there he fell to tapping each board of the floor with the butt of his revolver.

"Tight—tight as a drum, every one of them! Not one has been started. Yet in some place he must have hidden—— Denny, where does that door lead?" he broke off to cry, again leaping to his feet.

"To a back stairway, sir, used only by we men who work in the building. It leads down to the rear court through which coal is brought in and——"

"The key! Have you the key?" interrupted Boyd, darting to the door. "Ha! let me have it. This way—this way, Jimmie! We'll yet find them. He must have hidden—oh, ho, the stairs!"

Closely followed by the others, Boyd had darted into a narrow, dusty entry, from which a flight of stairs led to the floor below. Upon these he fell, testing first the floor boards, then that of each successive stair, until he had reached the third from the landing.

Then a cry of exultation broke from him—the footboard of the third stair was loose. With a fierce, upward jerk he tore it away and disclosed, in the open space under the stair, a yellow leather bag, securely strapped, and beside it a black wig and beard.

A half-smothered cry broke from Ranger, and Coleman yelled impulsively:

"By thunder, Felix, you've turned the trick! It's the very stuff!"

"Ay, and here's the link of a cuff button lost by the scoundrel when he hid the plunder!" shouted Boyd, with a dive into the open space mentioned.

For the first time the nerve and self-possession of one of his hearers deserted him. Involuntarily, before he could guess that he was being made the victim of a most shrewd and artfully enacted ruse, Burton Ranger's hands went to examine his cuffs.

In an instant Boyd was upon his feet and upon his man, yelling fiercely:

"Let go of your cuff, Ranger! Let go, I say! I'll be the first to see if the missing link——"

"Damn you! I'll not suffer you to——"

"Let go!" thundered Boyd. "Get him from behind, Jimmie! Look out for his gun! He'll shoot you or him-

self—steady! I've got him now! Slip bracelets on him if he shows further fight. I'll keep this cuff, Ranger, merely to show that——"

"Oh, there's no need! I throw up my hands and confess the whole business."

"Well, I'm glad of that," said Boyd, with much dryness. "For you now may see that there's no cuff link missing. I had to take some way by which to evoke your confession, though I've known from the start that you were my man!"

Such episodes can be only inadequately described. For ten seconds, while Boyd tore Ranger's cuff from his wrist, there had been a fight on the stairs more desperate even than that in the vestibule. For Ranger, blind to the trick evoking his self-betrayal, with cheeks grown as white as the collar at his throat, had snatched out a revolver, and, first attempting vainly to escape, then had made a frenzied effort to turn the weapon upon himself. He wilted like a wet rag, however, when Boyd got him by the throat and disarmed him, and then hoarsely uttered the few incriminating words which led to Felix Boyd's dry admission of his own cunning.

Without waiting for explanations then and there, Boyd turned quickly to the amazed janitor and said, with some austerity:

"Hark you, Denny! Keep your mouth closed about this, now and hereafter. One word from you about it will cost you your job. The matter may be settled out of court, for there's no case here for the police. Haul out that bag, Jimmie, and we'll take our man back to his own office. It's lucky for him, too, that his knavery was committed in his own office and that he is one of the firm."

"No, Jimmie, there was no case for the police," remarked Felix Boyd, while discussing the affair with Coleman in his Pine Street office next morning. "Morally, however, Ranger was as rascally a thief as stands in leather. Yet it's an open question whether the member of a banking firm can be successfully prosecuted for entering his own office with a gun and removing some of his own property. At all events, Gaston does not care to push the case, having recovered his money, and Ranger drops out of the firm—and probably out of this section of the country."

The Central Office man grimly shrugged his shoulders.

"He's dead lucky to get away at that," said he. "How the dickens did you tumble to it so quickly that he was the thief?"

Boyd laughed lightly.

"I already have told you, Jimmie, in the disclosures and deductions mentioned in Gaston's office," said he. "I felt sure from the start that only some man in that office could have become so familiar with things that he would venture so desperate a crime. It was easy enough to fix upon the man, the whereabouts of the others being clearly established. The fact that there was an unusually large amount of bonds in the safe on that particular day, moreover, further showed that one of the inmates of the office was the guilty party."

"What was Ranger's object?"

"He had been speculating secretly, contrary to an agreement with his partners, and was deeply in the hole. He took this desperate chance to square himself."

"Ah! I see."

"He showed up so quickly after the crime, however, that I knew he must have hidden the stuff upstairs. To find it, and at the same time so work upon Ranger's feelings as to evoke a self-betrayal, was the occasion of my own display of excitement. I aimed to shake his nerves a trifle, that I might surely drop him at the crucial moment. You have seen how the trick was turned, Jimmie."

"Well—rather!" drawled the Central Office man, with a smile evincing an admiration too profound for comments.

(*The next story in this series will be "The Case of the Trap-Gun."*)

The Confessions of a Hotel Manager

By Louis Tracy

Author of "The Great Mogul," "The Wings of the Morning," Etc.

[NOTE.—The great modern hostelry, with its small army of servants and its hundreds of guests, most of whom are virtually unknown to the management, is sometimes the scene of strange happenings, though the public seldom hears of them, for such notoriety is not desired by the proprietor. This series of stories by Mr. Louis Tracy, an English author whose work is well and favorably known on both sides of the Atlantic, is based on events which have actually occurred, though, for obvious reasons, it has been found necessary to conceal the identity of both people and places.—THE EDITOR.]

III.—THE BRIDAL JEWELS

(*A Complete Story*)

THE De Souza-Forrest wedding was a very grand affair.

The bridegroom was young, wealthy and of excellent appearance, considering his hybrid descent, as his ancestors included Portuguese, Hindus, Arabs and British sailors.

His grandfather amassed lakhs of rupees when the pagoda tree grew in India; his father added to the hoard by buying early mining claims in the Transvaal; and he himself, after acquiring the manners and tastes of an English gentleman at a public school, was learning how to spend his great revenue in a befitting manner.

The bride, a Miss Evelyn Forrest, was as beautiful and accomplished as might be expected.

But there was a hint of romance in the manner of their meeting.

It was rumored that George de Souza had wooed and won her owing to a chance acquaintance brought about by a bicycle accident, and people said that the pretty Evelyn did not know the extent of her conquest until her lover explained matters to her mother.

The Forrests were poor but well-bred. Their little villa at Twickenham offered no manner of accommodation for the hundreds of guests whom such a ceremony was bound to attract, so the affair took place at the Park Lane Hotel.

I well remember my jubilation when Mr. De Souza gave me the order for a wedding breakfast for fifty persons, and a reception for three hundred.

The marriage took place in St. George's, Hanover Square, on a bright day in January. That there should be such a thing as a bright day in January in London is not the least strange part of a strange story.

At that time a most useful train quitted Charing Cross at 2:20 P. M. and carried you to Paris by ten o'clock.

Hence the arrangements were: Marriage, 11:30 A. M.; breakfast and reception, 12:30 to any time in the afternoon; departure of Mr. and Mrs. De Souza from the hotel for Paris and the Riviera, 2 P. M.

I was given *carte blanche* in every respect. Mr. De Souza was explicit on that point.

"I want you to do everything, Mr. White," he said. "I do not wish to be

This series began in the June issue. The back numbers can be obtained through any newsdealer. Price, ten cents each.

troubled about any items until we arrive at the Ritz. Please hand all tickets, etc., to my man. Let me have a memorandum of the total cost, and I will send you a check."

That is the sort of order the manager of a big hotel appreciates. Then he can do things properly.

The wedding was really a nice one.

A great many rich and titled friends of the groom mixed with the simpler folk who claimed kith and kin with the Forrests.

The presents were numerous and valuable, as the newspapers say. Three detectives looked after them, so I felt safe in that direction.

The ladies present were loud in their admiration of a necklace of pearls, a diamond pendant, and a bracelet of rubies and diamonds worn by the bride.

Evidently Mr. De Souza meant his wife to be second to none in her adornments. These were new, but those who were acquainted with his parents said that her jewel case upstairs probably contained trinkets worth a king's ransom.

My friend, Mr. Brent, was invited to the wedding.

At first he feared he would be away hunting, but a sudden spell of frost kept him in town. Oh, how I thanked my stars afterward!

At 1:30 P. M. the blushing bride—and, indeed, she merited the adjective—slipped away to her suite on the third floor to don her traveling costume.

De Souza changed his garments in a couple of minutes, and was back again in the reception room, having a farewell drink with some of his intimate friends, before anyone had missed him from the room.

Several smart young scions of the aristocracy were laughing the shyness out of the bridesmaids, the older hands were solid in their appreciation of the champagne and *pâté de foie gras* sandwiches, and all was going with a lively swing that proved infectious, until a white-faced maid ran to Mrs. Forrest—a nice, white-haired lady, almost as pretty as her daughter—and whispered something to her.

"Mrs. De Souza gone! Where has she gone to?" demanded the startled mother, forgetting to modulate her voice.

"I don't know, ma'am. Indeed I don't. A man—a waiter—brought her a note the moment she entered her room. She read it, and laughed. She asked me for her jewel case. I gave it to her. She went out just as she was, in her wedding dress. I haven't seen her since."

The maid blurted out this amazing information before the whole roomful.

I was not there at the moment. Mr. Brent, who happened to notice the girl's face as she came in and strolled after her, told me he heard the Louis Quinze clock on the mantelpiece ticking as she finished.

Mrs. Forrest turned, in dumb bewilderment, to her son-in-law.

"Shall I go and see what has happened?" she murmured. "There must have been some accident——"

The clock struck two. Instantly it was borne in on the assembled company that a very serious and unaccountable incident had taken place.

If Mrs. De Souza had not yet commenced to change her dress, she must either travel in her wedding dress or miss her train.

De Souza was a man of action.

"Come with me," he said, quietly, to Mrs. Forrest. He caught hold of the maid.

"Be quick!" he whispered. "Take us to my wife's room."

Mr. Brent slipped out after them. He sent a waiter flying to bring me. In a minute, or less, the five of us were standing in the bride's deserted apartment.

But there was nothing new to learn. The maid had given her message quite explicitly in the drawing room.

Mr. Brent took the rôle of questioner.

"You are Mrs. De Souza's own maid?"

"Yes, sir."

"Did you know the man who brought the note?"

"No, sir."

"Was he one of the hotel servants?"

"He seemed to be, sir. He wore the hotel livery."

"I can soon settle that," I interposed, pressing the electric bell.

A waiter appeared.

"Is this he?" I asked.

"Oh, no, sir," she answered. "He was taller and younger and not so stout."

Wilkins, the waiter, looked from one to the other in surprise. He knew Mrs. De Souza had vanished, and, indeed, had assisted the maid in a hasty search for her mistress before she ventured to spread the alarm downstairs.

I explained that Wilkins was in charge of the floor, and none of the other servants was permitted to take any message, or show any visitors to rooms on that story, without, in the first place, consulting him.

The occurrence was so *outré*, so utterly opposed to all ordinary events, that we gazed at one another in complete bewilderment.

There were so many things to be done that even Mr. Brent was at a loss to decide which to do first.

Mrs. Forrest settled our indecision by fainting. While the maid was attending to her, the barrister caught De Souza by the arm and led him to one side.

"This matter is serious," he said, in a low tone. "It demands instant action on definite lines. Therefore I must ask you to tell me candidly whether or not you believe your wife was willing to marry you. In a word, had she any prior attachment which she abandoned on account of your position?"

The poor young man smiled even in his misery.

"I thought our love story was the talk of London," he said.

"So it is. But London often talks nonsense."

"Well, you can disregard any suspicion of a rival. Evelyn and I were devoted to each other. Of that there cannot be the least possible doubt. Good God, man, here is a letter she wrote to me last night, telling me the thoughts of the concluding hours of the first epoch of her life!"

Brent was satisfied. He declined to open the real *billet-doux* which De Souza produced from a pocket.

Now, to render clear what follows, I must explain that the Park Lane Hotel floor plan looks like the letter H. The long sides of the letter are corridors, with rooms right and left, while the connecting bar in the center holds the staircase, lifts, lobbies and servants' pantries.

Mr. Brent instantly ascertained from Wilkins that Mrs. De Souza, whom he saw as she passed from the lift to her suite, had certainly not returned, to his knowledge.

"The inference," said the barrister, "is that she is detained by force in one of the rooms on this floor and in this corridor. There can be no question about it. It is your immediate duty, Mr. White, to search each room."

I always carry with me a master key that opens every lock in the hotel. When such things are wanted they are wanted in a hurry.

Brent, De Souza and I passed out. I saw that Mrs. Forrest was slowly yielding to the maid's restorative devices.

Some people were in their rooms, some out. I need not detail events until we reached the suite tenanted by the Dowager Duchess of Grosmont, who was brought to the hotel by her doctor and a manservant three days earlier.

"It is a pity to disturb her," I said. "She particularly requested me not to announce her arrival in town, as she was recovering from a serious illness, and did not wish to be bothered with callers."

"A partial search is no search," said the imperturbable Brent. "We must intrude on her grace."

I knocked. There was no answer.

I beckoned to Wilkins.

"Her grace has not gone out?" I asked.

"No, sir. But the doctor and a young lady went downstairs about a quarter to two."

"What young lady?"

"I don't know, sir. She was a stranger."

I knocked again. Mr. Brent looked

at his watch. I am quick at taking hints, so I unlocked the door.

In a chair facing the windows—with her back to the door—sat the duchess, who was not only elderly but decrepit. She was alone.

"I beg your grace's pardon for intruding," I began, "but—er——"

Mr. Brent has the quickest eyes of any man I have ever met. It is my business to enter a room and see with a glance if every piece of furniture, each picture, each fork or spoon, is in its proper place.

I can find a superficial inch of dust on a ten-foot sideboard, and detect a microscopic stain on a carpet, but I will never understand how he was able, before the apology left my lips, to discover that it was no rheumatic and querulous old lady at whom we were gazing.

He passed me with a rush, lifted lace cap and gray wig from the dark brown hair of Mrs. De Souza, removed a gag from that terrified young lady's mouth, untwisted the thin wires which bound her to the chair, and in far less time than I have taken to describe it she was sobbing in her husband's arms, while the black silk dress draped over her bridal robes fell to the floor.

Her story was simple enough. It was explained, quite succinctly, by the letter she produced from the pocket of her dress.

Written on the hotel note paper, and headed: "No. 310, three doors from your room, on the right," it ran:

> DEAR MRS. DE SOUZA: I am an old woman and confined to my room. I have heard of you and your little romance, and I wish you much joy in your married life. May I ask a favor? Come and see me for one minute in your wedding dress. It will gladden my old eyes. I knew your husband's mother. She possessed a famous collection of jewels. I suppose he has given you some, if not all. I am supposed, by my friends, to be an expert in such matters, so, if you have time to show them to me, I may tell you some interesting facts. Yours, in haste, and with every good wish, ELIZABETH,
>
> Dowager Duchess of Grosmont.

What girl wife would refuse such a request? And the artful way, too, in which it was insinuated that, perhaps, her spouse might not have given her all his mother's belongings.

Of course, when the poor girl was seized, gagged and despoiled of all her ornaments, both those she wore and the larger collection carried in the jewel case, it required little divination on her part to know that the dowager duchess and her associates were thieves of the front rank.

Mr. Brent again consulted his watch. It was twelve minutes past two—not a bad record of achievement on his part.

"The scoundrels have twenty-seven minutes' start of us," he exclaimed, in that cheerfully nonchalant way of his. "That is a long time in London. Now, Mr. De Souza, take your wife to her mother. Go downstairs yourself and reassure your guests by telling them that Mrs. De Souza lost some of her pearls and was looking for them. Mr. White will telephone to Charing Cross, your saloon carriage can be uncoupled and run down by a special engine half an hour later. You and Mrs. De Souza will start at 2:50 P. M., eh?"

His amazing readiness seemed to smooth away all difficulties. I don't think De Souza paid much heed, he was so busy squeezing his wife to restore her color, and he seemed to be succeeding.

"We will regard that as settled," went on Mr. Brent. "You and I will look after the thieves, Mr. White. Mr. De Souza's jewelers, no doubt, can give us a detailed description of the lost property. They supplied the presents, and reset the contents of the jewel case, I suppose. Mrs. De Souza, everything depends upon you. You must be ready to depart at two-thirty, and it is now two-fifteen."

No one could dispute his masterful manner.

We all did exactly what we were told to do.

In the result, the happy couple drove away amid a shower of confetti, and the guests took their departure by degrees, wondering very greatly, I expect, what was the exact nature of the accident to the bride's necklace.

I heard one woman whisper to another:

"Pearls are tears, they say. If so, Mrs. De Souza has had her share quickly. Although she was beaming when she came downstairs, I am quite sure she had been crying."

Mr. Brent signaled me into the office at the earliest possible moment.

"Tell me all about the Duchess of Grosmont," he said.

"She came here late on Saturday," I answered. "Her arrival was prefaced by a telegram from York engaging rooms. I spoke to her myself. She looked to be an old woman of seventy-five or eighty, though her voice was very clear——"

"A woman's voice?"

"Unquestionably. I suppose the lines on her face were make-up, but I remember being impressed by the brilliance of her eyes. Still, in this hotel, you will see ladies who are grandmothers flirting with other women's grandsons."

"What of her companions?"

"The man who passed as a doctor was tall, thin, an old-looking young man, I should call him, with a hooked nose and steel-blue eyes. Not a pleasant-mannered person."

"You would know him again?"

"I think so. I only saw him that night and again yesterday. Meals were served in their rooms."

"And the manservant?"

"A quiet, respectable type of valet. An advertisement in the *Morning Post* would bring you a dozen such."

"Ah!"

Mr. Brent meant a great deal by that monosyllable, as a rule.

"I must be off now," he said, rising suddenly. "I will retain this letter for a few hours, if you don't mind," he added, indicating the note received by Mrs. De Souza.

"Am I to send for the police?" I asked, despondently. The moment he suggested taking his departure, the burden of this calamitous affair seemed to overwhelm me.

"I think it is advisable," he said. "You must shift the responsibility off your shoulders, you know. Tell them all that you know. It won't make any difference to the result. The brain that planned this audacious robbery will not enter the arms of a policeman in plain clothes."

"What a blow for the hotel!" I cried, in desperation.

"It may be. If I can do nothing before this time to-morrow, it certainly will be. But if you are able to wire to Mr. De Souza that his wife's gems have been recovered, things will not be so bad, eh?"

"Is there any hope, Mr. Brent?"

"There is always hope. Good-by, now."

While Mr. De Souza and his newly wedded wife were hurrying to Paris, Mr. Brent was driving to an address in Bond Street.

The millionaire had given him a note to the proprietor, and within five minutes of his arrival he obtained a complete list of the missing articles, with a detailed technical description of each ornament.

Then he drove to one of the few first-rate registry offices in London—a place where good servants can always be obtained by employers willing to pay the price for those comparatively rare individuals.

No; they had not recently supplied any domestics to the Duchess of Grosmont. In fact, her grace was not one of their patrons.

He tried another firm, equally well known.

Here he struck a trail at once. Her grace had telegraphed from York a week ago. She required the services of an experienced courier and valet for a few days.

They had sent a man named Wilton, a thoroughly reliable person. He was disengaged that day. If Mr. Brent wanted this paragon of all the domestic virtues they would communicate with Wilton instantly.

"Excellent!" said the barrister. "Send a messenger in a cab now, at my expense."

Somewhat surprised by the urgency

of the demand, the manageress complied.

After a tiring wait of an hour, Wilton turned up; his references were capital, one of the most glowing being a testimonial written that morning by the Dowager Duchess of Grosmont.

Without further delay, the barrister hurried the man into a hansom and took him to his flat in Victoria Street.

By exercising his marvelous faculty for distinguishing the true criminals in any case under investigation, he formed the definite conclusion that Wilton was an unconscious accessory to the crime, and acted in the belief that he was serving the great lady whose personality served as a cloak for the female conspirator.

"It was a stroke of genius on their part," said Mr. Brent to me afterward, "to employ a genuine valet. Very likely he was acquainted with more than one of the domestics in your hotel. Such a man conferred on the conspirators the hall mark of their assumed rank."

Wilton, amazed and frightened at first when he learned the facts, entered heart and soul into the chase.

For one thing, his reputation was at stake; for another, he was greatly angered to find that an expert like himself could be so outrageously hoodwinked.

The *soi-disant* duchess and her medical adviser had humbugged him as successfully as all others in the hotel.

Mr. Brent's adroit questions, no less than Wilton's desire to give useful information, elicited little of value until the valet chanced to mention that Dr. Jones was in the habit of purchasing newspapers and periodicals several times daily at an obscure news vender's shop in the Edgware Road.

"One afternoon," he said, "I happened to see him leaving the place, and, as he seldom returned to his room unless he was carrying one paper or another, I assumed that he went there regularly."

"Did he know that you saw him on that occasion?"

"No, sir. As a matter of fact, I imagined it was a place for receiving letters. Lots of people in society use those addresses."

"Did he write much in the hotel—send away letters or telegrams?"

"I never saw a scrap of writing in his room, sir."

"Was his linen marked?"

"Yes, with the initials E. H. J. Her ladyship—I mean the lady who pretended to be the duchess—had a coronet on all her belongings."

So they were thorough in their rascality.

"I suppose you were engaged to attend the doctor and help the duchess into and out of her carriage, up and downstairs, and the rest?"

"That's it exactly, sir. They paid me well—two pounds a week and all found."

"Let us make some inquiry at the newspaper shop."

They drove to the place, and the proprietor, at the outset, met the barrister with denials.

But the sight of a sovereign, and a quiet hint that the next visitors might be the police, opened the man's mouth instantly.

He remembered the doctor quite well from Mr. Brent's description. But the name he gave for letters was not Jones. "E. H. Jackson, Esq.," was the superscription, and he noticed that three letters, which rewarded the inquirer's constant visits, bore the Ebury Street post-office stamp.

It was a clew, but a slight one. Pimlico covers a multitude of people—and sins.

Nevertheless, the barrister followed it with characteristic vigor. Within a very short space of time Wilton was established in a room overlooking the post office in question.

His instructions were to watch until midnight and see if the doctor appeared in that locality. He was not to trouble about the "duchess." If he chanced to catch sight of Jackson he was to follow him.

While the police were circularizing the pawnbrokers of London with lists of the stolen gems—as though the genius which planned the trick played on Mrs.

De Souza would endeavor instantly to dispose of articles so easily identified—Mr. Brent was telephoning to the hotel at York, where the duchess and Dr. Jones were residing when Wilton joined them.

Not a word did he say of the robbery. He merely made guarded inquiry as to their actions. They told precisely the same story as that which served their purposes so well in the Park Lane Hotel.

They arrived one afternoon, dined in their sitting room and left next day for London.

"Did they pay their bill in gold or tender a note?"

"In gold, I think. May I ask what is the object of your question?" came the surprised reply of the manager.

"Because these people were masquerading, the woman particularly, under assumed names."

"Ah, that explains it."

"Explains what?"

"Well—er—my housekeeper, thinking the old lady had left her room after breakfast, opened the door suddenly. The duchess was seated at a table with a quantity of grease tubes and brushes, together with a looking-glass and a photograph in front of her. The instant the door opened she swept all the smaller articles into a towel and bounced toward the window, with surprising activity for an old lady. The housekeeper apologized, and asked if she could help in any way, but the duchess cried to her to leave the room instantly. Of course she obeyed, but——"

He hesitated.

"Yes; go on, please," said Mr. Brent.

"She happened to notice a number of letters amid the litter on the table. She did not see to whom they were addressed, but they were in the easily recognized envelopes of the Jollity Theater."

"Ah," murmured the barrister.

I wish I could have heard him utter that monosyllable. It would have cheered a weary night.

"So, from what you tell me," went on the manager, "I expect she was an actress."

"Thank you," was the answer. "Both you and the housekeeper will hear from me again."

He hung up the receiver, gave instructions to his man, Smith, in case any message came from Wilton, and hurried to the Jollity.

He knew the assistant manager, and that gentleman brought him to the stage manager.

"Have any of your ladies been absent from the theater during the past week?" he inquired.

"Yes. Three."

"Who were they?"

The stage manager gave him the names. Two members of the chorus were absent on dates which did not promise results, but a third, Miss Daisy Rowell, had been away eight days—came back to work that evening, in fact.

"Can you point her out to me quietly?"

The stage manager laughed; Brent did not impress him as a stage-struck member of the *jeunesse dorée.*

"Yes," he said. "There she is. Third village maid on the O. P. Good figure, first-rate actress, but not much voice, or she would be a leading lady."

Brent gave her one all-devouring glance, and turned away. She chanced to glance in his direction.

"I am satisfied," he smiled. "Please don't let her know I am infatuated."

The second act of the opera was drawing to a close. He hastened to the stage door.

"I want you to tell me when Miss Daisy Rowell comes out," he explained to the doorkeeper. "These young ladies wear such large hats and magnificent veils that I cannot distinguish one from the other at night."

A slight monetary transaction completed the arrangement.

Brent, having secured a hansom with a good horse, took up his stand in an agreed position.

Singly and in groups the miscellaneous collection that makes up the delusion of the footlights began to leave the theater.

Musicians, gas men, well-known ac-

tresses, scene shifters, poured out promiscuously, grimy workingmen jostling the full-page celebrities of the illustrated papers.

At last the subsidized janitor gave him a sharp glance and a wink.

A smartly attired young woman hastened into the street, turned the first corner, and made her way, with the unwavering certainty of the born Londoner, to a corner of the Strand, where the Monster 'bus picks up passengers for Pimlico.

The barrister, following in the hansom, imagined that she was hurrying to some restaurant.

No; the woman he suspected of complicity in the most audacious jewel robbery of recent years took a seat inside a plebeian omnibus, going home with a directness that, under other circumstances, would have prejudiced him in her favor.

But, whether innocent or guilty, he must know more of Miss Daisy Rowell than he knew at present.

Bidding his driver go rapidly to the Westminster end of Whitehall, he dismissed the cab at that point.

Boarding the 'bus there, he assured himself before he ascended to the roof that the lady was still seated within.

Then his task was simple enough.

The girl alighted at a street corner shortly before the vehicle reached the termination of its journey.

Brent followed her. He was an adept in all the ruses of the skilled "shadow." He could saunter with careless ease or adopt the mien of the preoccupied man of affairs.

Little thinking that she was under espionage, the girl let herself into the house with a latchkey.

The barrister saw, through the corner of his eye, that she entered the third doorway from a certain lamp-post.

He walked to the end of the street, came back and passed the door itself.

The hour was late, past midnight. At that time the more distant parts of London begin to rest. Like the human frame, the metropolis starts sleeping at the extremities.

Brent watched the house until half-past one.

No one else approached it. A light in an upper window was visible for a long time. Then it vanished, and the barrister was left to solitude and the earnest attention of a policeman on the beat.

At last he turned into Ebury Street, passing the post office and glancing at the window from which Wilton might yet be on guard, if he were as keen in the chase as he professed to be.

Yes, the man was there, and recognized him instantly when the light from a gas lamp fell on his face.

In response to a signal the valet joined him.

The stalking policeman became excited. What were these villains up to?

He was greatly disappointed when they summoned a prowling hansom, but he rapidly came near enough to catch the address given and to note the number of the vehicle.

The barrister laughed at the constable's mystification, yet the incident had consequences.

Inspector Winter, of Scotland Yard, had ascertained Wilton's description from me and the hotel servants.

He circularized the man instantly, and the Pimlico constable reported the result of his observations, of which more anon.

Mr. Brent was tired.

He committed Wilton to the care of his man, and went to bed, saying that he would breakfast at eight-thirty.

Next morning he called me up on the telephone, and asked me to meet him at nine-fifteen at Ebury Street post office, bringing with me a couple of sturdy hall porters, not in uniform.

Wondering, hoping against hope that a sleepless night might be followed by a day of better luck, I obeyed implicitly.

The barrister was punctual at the rendezvous. With him was Wilton.

"I am following a doubtful clew," he explained. "I may be utterly mistaken. There is nothing so deceitful as coincidence. But in a case of such magnitude I must throw caution to the winds and kick delay after it. I am going

to a certain house. If I am admitted, and not expelled ignominiously, I may want you. Keep an eye on the door and windows. Above all else, don't hesitate to burst the door open if you have any reason to believe that your help is needed."

Nice instructions these to give to a respectable hotel manager in broad daylight in a decent London thoroughfare.

But I was desperate. To rehabilitate the Park Lane Hotel in the eyes of its fashionable *clientèle* I would have striven to force my way into Buckingham Palace.

Accompanied by Wilton, he knocked at the door of the house indicated.

He admitted of no parley. When a maid appeared he smilingly brushed past her.

"Where are Miss Rowell's rooms?" he demanded.

"Upstairs, sir," gasped the astonished girl.

He ran up, followed by the valet.

He tapped quietly at a door, by the side of which was a small table, such as servants use for depositing laden trays.

"Come in," said a man's voice.

Wilton uttered an exclamation, but the barrister signed to him to be quiet.

He entered the room. A tall man and a young woman, both in *déshabille,* were breakfasting. The apartment was crammed with trunks, corded and labeled for a journey.

"Good-morning, your grace. Good-morning, Dr. Jones," said Mr. Brent, affably.

With an oath the man sprang toward his coat, which was lying on the back of a chair.

The barrister whipped out a revolver.

"Mine is handier," he cried. "Better be quiet, Jones, alias Jackson. I will not take any risks. Moreover, the house is surrounded. The game is up."

The woman screamed and flung her arms around her companion.

She thought the newcomer meant to shoot him then and there, and she made piteous appeals for mercy.

"That's him," cried Wilton, excitedly, glancing at the man. "I would know him among a thousand; and that's the duchess' voice."

The barrister, cool and wary, now that he had, in truth, found the quarry, said to the valet, without taking his eyes off the angry doctor and his good-looking but distraught partner:

"Leave me here, Wilton, for a few minutes. Close the door, but wait on the landing."

The man obeyed.

"How, in the name of— "

But Mr. Brent interrupted the baffled thief's furious outburst.

"It is not for you to ask questions, but to answer them," he said, sternly. "Where are the stolen jewels?"

"Where neither you nor anybody else can get at them," the man snarled.

"In that case I have nothing further to say. It only remains for me to hand you over to the police."

A hint in his words caused hope to battle with the blank despair on the *soi-disant* doctor's face.

"Hand me over—— Are you not a detective?"

"Not from Scotland Yard."

"What do you mean, then?"

"Again you are demanding, instead of imparting, information. I repeat, where is your plunder?"

"Not too far away."

"I thought not. You are prepared for a journey. Where were you going?"

The man paused, but distraught Daisy Rowell blurted out:

"To South Africa."

"When?"

"To-day. We have joined a touring company, which sails in the *Scot* to-morrow."

Mr. Brent smiled pleasantly.

"It would be a pity to disturb your arrangements, Miss Rowell," he said, emphasizing her name. "I think I said the house was surrounded. It is, but not by the police. Nevertheless, they may be here at any moment. Mr. White, the manager of the Park Lane Hotel, is outside. Shall I send for him? It may be—I can promise nothing—but it *may* be possible he will convince me I am mistaken in thinking that

you ever masqueraded under the guise of the elderly Dowager of Grosmont and her medical attendant."

"Dr. Jones" grimaced savagely. He understood, now. He was beaten.

"Call Mr. White," he growled.

So I was summoned.

Mr. Brent met me at the door.

"Get the diamonds, check them with this list, make no promises and clear out," he whispered.

I admit that these extraordinary instructions flustered me. Nor was my agitation lessened when I entered the apartment and found myself face to face with the "doctor" and with a lady whose eyes alone resembled the brilliant orbs of the decrepit duchess.

The man opened a wicker luncheon basket, fitted with enameled cups and saucers, plates, etc. He handed me two small parcels made up in sugar paper.

"There they are," he snarled. "Now be off."

I tore asunder the frail wrappings and revealed a miscellaneous collection of superb trinkets, which tumbled in a heap on the cloth of the breakfast table.

I checked them with the list given me by the barrister. They were absolutely intact.

"They have restored everything," I told Mr. Brent.

"Ah! I was sure the duchess had only borrowed them. One must excuse a crotchety old lady for the fright she has given us."

The remark amazed me considerably.

He put his head inside the room again.

"The next train for Southampton is by far the best of the day," he said. "I will make it my business to follow the proceedings of your touring company, and, from what the stage manager of the Jollity said to me last night, I am sure Miss Rowell will rise in her profession, if she sticks to it, works hard and endeavors to amass wealth by legitimate means."

"How much start do we get?" said the man, despairingly.

"That I cannot tell you. You must take your chance. I will endeavor to forget your address."

"One thing more," said the discomfited rogue. "How did you drop on to us so suddenly?"

The barrister laughed gently.

"You should not have used a newspaper shop for your letters," he murmured.

It was no part of his design to let the rascal blame the woman for the downfall of their plot.

The porters, wondering, no doubt, why they had been brought from the hotel to this remote part of Pimlico, walked home.

Wilton drove with me in a four-wheeler.

"I have little doubt," said Mr. Brent to him, suddenly, "that Mr. De Souza will give you twenty pounds for forgetting everything that has taken place in Ebury Street. When all is said and done, the duchess was an eccentric person, and you have behaved admirably."

The valet seemed to be taken aback at first, but he grinned his comprehension, and, sure sign of a discreet servant, said nothing.

Mr. Winter arrested him that afternoon, and I had to use some wit and skill to liberate him without committing myself.

It was the Pimlico policeman's report that helped most.

The Scotland Yard man knew that Brent had forestalled him, but it was difficult for him to go beyond my explicit statement that there had been a huge mistake about Mrs. De Souza's diamonds, and that the duchess herself was the most perturbed person in London when the facts became known to her.

The valet got his twenty pounds, and Mr. De Souza gave me a splendid set of studs, which I had done nothing whatever to deserve.

Mr. Brent told me later that his reward came when Winter called at his flat one evening for a confidential chat over cigars and whisky.

"By the way," said the professional, "now it is all finished, you might tell me the facts about the De Souza affair. The story will give me a wrinkle or two for the next big jewel robbery."

THE APE AND THE DIAMOND

By Richard Marsh

Author of "The Whistle of Fate," "The House of Mystery," Etc.

SYNOPSIS OF CHAPTERS PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED.

On the death of his brother Matthew, Samuel Hookham, a miserly London capitalist, comes into possession of a magnificent gem known as "the Devil's Diamond," and with it a letter stating that the stone has the peculiar property of bringing bad luck to its owner, and that it will be found impossible to sell it, though it may be given away. Hookham scoffs at the idea, but misfortunes come thick and fast, and all his efforts to sell the stone prove fruitless. Finally M. and Madame Nurvetchky, the proprietors of an amusement resort, hear of the remarkable gem and persuade Hookham to permit them to exhibit it. They invite anyone who cares to do so to come upon the stage and test the diamond for himself, whereupon Mr. Percy Leicester, a wealthy young Englishmar who has made a special study of conjurer's tricks, comes forward. After some uncanny manifestations, he offers to buy the stone, but he has no sooner spoken the words than a sheet of flame leaps from the diamond, and the next moment Leicester is seen stretched on the floor—dead. Hookham and the Nurvetchkys are arrested for murder, the principal witness against them being Mr. Skene, a clergyman. During the trial the magistrate asks to see the mysterious diamond, and is informed that it is still in the possession of Hookham. He thereupon summons the inspector who searched the prisoners.

CHAPTER XI—(*Continued*).

MR. FAIRLIGHT BEGINS HIS CROSS-EXAMINATION.

"INSPECTOR CLIFFORD, come to the front." The inspector came to the front. Mr. Fairlight addressed the magistrate.

"Our whole case is based upon this diamond. In the face of what the superintendent has just now said, I ask you, sir, to require from this man an immediate explanation as to why he allowed it to remain in the possession of my client."

The magistrate put the inspector through his facings.

"Why didn't you take this diamond from the prisoner?"

"I did take it—at first."

"You did take it! Did you return it to him then?"

"Yes."

"Good gracious me! Why? Weren't you aware what an important bearing it had upon the case?"

"Well, for one thing——"

The inspector hesitated.

"Go on!" said the magistrate.

"For one thing, it burned my hand."

"Burned your hand? Why, didn't the other inspector say it burned him, too?"

"Yes, and it burned me in exactly the same way. It branded the word 'fool' in the center of my palm. It's there yet."

The inspector held out his hand, so that the magistrate could see. The old gentleman peered at it through his glasses.

"Dear me! Quite plain! That's very awkward for you, inspector—and for the other inspector, too. Where is this remarkable stone?"

"Here." And with that reply—which was sufficiently curt and to the point—Mr. Hookham produced the diamond from his waistcoat pocket.

"Is it cool now?"

"Perfectly cool."

This serial began in the May number. The back numbers can be obtained through any newsdealer. Price, ten cents each.

"Let me look at it."

Mr. Fairlight interposed.

"Now that the diamond has appeared upon the scene, and before you touch it, Mr. Mansell, I judge it better to inform you what is the nature of the defense that we intend to offer." He paused. His manner was most impressive. "We allege that the deceased man, Percy Leicester, met his death by handling that diamond. We allege that that diamond killed him. And, further, we allege that that diamond is possessed of what are commonly, and in this case correctly, called supernatural powers."

"Sensation" in court—in fact, the word "sensation" is inadequate to express the effect which Mr. Fairlight's words produced.

The magistrate, leaning forward on his desk, settled his spectacles on his nose. He did not look as though he understood—indeed, he owned that that was so.

"I don't understand," he said.

"Possibly not. I own that what I say is surprising. For a lawyer, desiring to retain his reputation for sanity, to stand up in open court and plead magic for his defense is a venturesome thing to do. Or it would be venturesome, were I not prepared, as I am, to prove my case up to the hilt; to so prove it, disdaining all resort to legal quibbles, that even skeptics shall believe."

"Pray, Mr. Fairlight, make yourself quite plain. You are aware, I presume, that to lay claim to magic powers is still an indictable offense?"

"I am prepared to take all risks."

"Very well. Then, in the meantime, perhaps I may be allowed to see this—eh — eh — under the circumstances—*really* remarkable stone?" Mr. Fairlight held out his arm—like a semaphore. His tone was solemn.

"Mr. Mansell, I warn you that that diamond has already killed one man. I warn you that my client is in no way accountable for its actions, which are as mysterious to him as they are to all who have witnessed them."

"As you yourself say, Mr. Fairlight, I am prepared to take the risk. Even in my boyhood I had a taste for the weird and wonderful. I don't think that I should object to witness a few manifestations of magic now that I am old." Mr. Mansell beckoned to Mr. Hookham. "Bring that diamond up here!" Mr. Hookham advanced to the bench, the diamond in his hand. "I suppose it won't kill me?"

"I cannot tell you."

"Put it down there and let me look at it."

Mr. Hookham placed the diamond on the magistrate's desk and returned to the dock. There was silence. For some moments the magistrate continued to gaze at the diamond. Then he glanced at Mr. Fairlight over the top of his spectacles.

"It is a diamond, I suppose?"

"It is. It is believed to be one of the finest diamonds in existence. Its value, at a trade valuation, is considerably over twenty thousand pounds."

"Sensation" in court—nothing like the mention of a good round sum to produce a "sensation" anywhere.

"It looks as though it were a valuable diamond. Well, as it has not at present shown any marvelous attributes, it can remain upon my desk. Suppose you continue your cross-examination of the witness?"

Mr. Fairlight continued.

CHAPTER XII.

THE DEVIL'S DIAMOND ENTERTAINS THE MAGISTRATE.

"With reference, Mr. Skene, to what you call the 'tricks' with the diamond. Tell us exactly what took place. When the curtain drew up did M. Nurvetchky make any remarks?"

"He did."

"Tell us, to the best of your recollection, what it was that he said."

"I cannot give you the exact words, but the effect was this. He said that he was going to tell us a strange story about a diamond."

"Did he say to whom the diamond belonged?"

"He said that it belonged to the

prisoner, Hookham, though that was not the name he called him by. I think——"

"Did he say how long it had been in the possession of Mr. Hookham?"

"He said that it only came into his possession yesterday."

The magistrate interposed.

"Yesterday? When was that?"

Mr. Fairlight explained.

"The diamond came into the possession of Mr. Hookham the day before yesterday. The statement to which the witness refers was made by M. Nurvetchky yesterday afternoon."

The magistrate nodded, and the examination went on.

"Did M. Nurvetchky say how the diamond reached Mr. Hookham?"

"He said it was a legacy from his brother."

"A what?"—this from the magistrate, putting his hand to his ear.

"A legacy from his brother," repeated the witness, raising his voice.

"Did he say that it was accompanied by anything?"

"By a letter."

"Did M. Nurvetchky read the letter to the audience?"

"He read what he alleged to be the letter."

"Is this it?"

Producing a paper from among a heap of others lying on the table in front of him, Mr. Fairlight handed it to the witness.

"To the best of my belief it is. At any rate, the wording appears to be the same."

"I am going to read this letter, Mr. Skene. Just attend carefully while I do so. 'My dear Samuel'—I should mention, what I believe M. Nurvetchky mentioned yesterday, that my client had not seen his brother, whose letter I now hold in my hand, for sixteen years—'I have told Mr. Truelove to give you the diamond which you will have with this, after I am dead and he has buried me. Be good enough to pay his bill.'"

"Who is Mr. Truelove?" inquired the magistrate.

"Mr. Truelove is an undertaker. If necessary, we are prepared to call him at the proper time. 'Mr. Truelove is a perfect stranger to me. It would seem a rash thing to intrust such a commission to a perfect stranger. But I have not the slightest doubt that you will get the diamond—sooner or later. Certainly quite soon enough for you!' I ask your particular attention, Mr. Skene, to what follows. 'It is called the Devil's Diamond——'"

"Called the what?" asked the magistrate.

"The Devil's Diamond."

Snap! There was a sound in court as though some one had snapped a pistol. "What was that?" demanded Mr. Mansell.

"I think it was the diamond," said Mr. Fairlight, with his eyes fixed upon the stone.

"Indeed? So our friend is showing signs of life at last. Perhaps it objects to be called such names. Go on."

"'It is called the Devil's Diamond, and is worth, at a trade valuation, at least twenty thousand pounds. It has the pleasing property of bringing ill luck to its possessor.'"

Sna-a-arl! This time there was a sound in court which resembled the snarling of a dog.

"I believe that was the diamond," observed Mr. Mansell, keeping his spectacles fixed curiously upon the stone.

"I believe it was," said Mr. Fairlight, and then read on. "'It has brought the devil's own luck to me. I was a rich man when first I had it. I am a beggar now, besides having lived the devil's own life into the bargain. If I were to tell you the pranks that cursed stone has played me!'"

Yah-h! There was no mistake about it this time. A sound resembling a snarl issued from the diamond with so much force as to cause the magistrate to precipitately withdraw his face from its near neighborhood.

"Bless my soul! Most surprising! There appears to be something the matter with the internal economy of this precious stone of yours, Mr. Fairlight. It sounds to me as though it suffers from indigestion. Go on."

"'It has at last succeeded in bringing me to an early grave. I have only had it two years, and it has done for me already. By the way, it possesses another pleasing property—it is impossible to sell it."

The magistrate interrupted.

"It's just as well the writer didn't omit to mention that. Impossible to sell it, is it? It appears to be a precious thing among precious stones."

"'Whoever tries to do so will have the best of reasons for being sorry that he ever tried. It can only be given away. Knowing your character as I do, I am aware that you will never be able to give away a stone of the value of twenty thousand pounds. It was impossible for me—how still more impossible will it be for you! If ghosts are allowed to revisit these earthly plains, I hope I shall be permitted to see the fun. There will be fun, I know. Your affectionate brother, Matthew Hookham.'"

Mr. Fairlight ceased, and Mr. Mansell began.

"The writer of that letter must have been a pleasant kind of man. I should like to have known him. In what lunatic asylum did he die?"

"The writer of that letter was as sane as either you or I."

"Was he, indeed? I must beg, Mr. Fairlight, that in such a matter you will speak for yourself, and not for me. Let me look at it." The letter was handed up. "And do you mean to say, Mr. Fairlight, that you expect me to consider this farrago of absurdities seriously?"

"Take care, sir!"

There was a cry in court. The magistrate looked up.

"What's the matter?"

"The letter will be on fire if you don't take care, sir."

The magistrate started back, only just in time. A thin, white flame had risen from the diamond, and was already blackening one of the edges of the letter. As the magistrate started back, taking the letter with him, the flame vanished. The old gentleman settled his spectacles on his nose and regarded the diamond intently.

"That's a curious stone—a very curious stone, indeed. I wonder if it often behaves like that." He again leaned forward, and resumed his examination of the letter. "I don't want to say anything which you might construe harshly, Mr. Fairlight, but at the same time, referring to this letter, I am bound to say——"

"Take care, sir!"

Again the cry rang out, issuing from the throats of half the people in the court. Again the magistrate started back. Again he was only just in time. The better to examine the letter, he held it right over the diamond—just as he had done before—so that when the thin, white flame again issued from the stone the edge which had been previously blackened began immediately to smolder. In another instant it would have been in flames. Mr. Mansell stared at the diamond, from which all appearance of flame again had vanished, and then at the letter, with its cindery edge.

"A curious stone! very curious stone indeed!" The old gentleman's tones were dry, as dry as M. Nurvetchky's could be upon occasion. He addressed himself to Mr. Hookham. "It is a somewhat curious question to be addressed by a magistrate on the bench to a prisoner in the dock, but may I ask if you claim to be a wizard, or a conjurer only?"

Mr. Hookham eyed the magistrate intently, his face, to speak figuratively, all ablaze with scorn.

"Neither," he shortly said.

"Indeed! Then let me tell you that you will not improve, but injure, your case by following the course of conduct you seem to have mapped out for yourself."

Mr. Fairlight intervened.

"Do I understand, sir, that you attribute what has just now happened to the action of my client?"

"I attribute nothing; only let the man take care. This remark I will make." Mr. Mansell made it with his eyes fixed on Mr. Hookham. "It is a serious thing to trifle with a court of justice, and so long as I occupy this place, I will take care that the man, be he whom

he may, who trifles with this court, has cause to regret his conduct."

Such pronouncements from the bench are generally effective, in one way if not in another. This one had the effect of turning all eyes toward Mr. Hookham.

For a moment it seemed as though Mr. Fairlight did not intend to allow the magisterial remarks to remain unanswered; but on second thoughts, apparently, he held his peace, standing motionless, with his eyes upon the magistrate.

That worthy gentleman, having relieved his mind, returned to the examination of the letter. This time he eschewed the neighborhood of the diamond, contenting himself with leaning back in his chair, with the epistle held close up to his spectacles. The examination was a lengthy one, the old eyes probably finding a difficulty, even with the aid of the spectacles, in deciphering the cramped, close writing. Mr. Fairlight remained silent while it continued.

By degrees people's eyes wandered from Mr. Hookham to the magistrate. They were rewarded by what they saw, for while Mr. Mansell continued engrossed in his scrutiny, what seemed to be a spark of fire sprang from the diamond on to the letter. In an instant it was in flames, and consumed—consumed so utterly that not even any ashes remained.

The magistrate's face and attitude, when this surprising thing took place, literally underneath his nose, would have been replete with suggestions for an artist blessed or cursed with a decided sense of humor.

He sat with his hands still held out in front of him, as a shortsighted man does sit who holds a letter to his nose —evidently quite unable to believe the evidence of his own shortsighted eyes. The letter was certainly not there; but he continued to stare as though it were.

Then his countenance, cheeks, chin, forehead, neck, ears, bald head and all, assumed the color of a soldier's red coat —its color, that is, when the said soldier is anxiously expecting a new issue —what we may describe as a dirty red. Then he looked up with a gasp. Then he sprang to his rheumatic old legs with a bound. Then he brought his gouty old hand down onto his desk with a bang. He glared at Mr. Hookham.

"How dare you, sir!" he yelled.

Although the words came from a magistrate's throat, they were delivered with a vigor which certainly amounted to a yell. Then followed what the newspapers describe, in their graphic way, as a "scene."

"I am prepared to take my oath," said Mr. Fairlight, not at all in a whisper, "that my client had nothing to do with what has just now happened."

"I am prepared to swear that, too," observed M. Nurvetchky — from the dock—which was certainly irregular.

"And I," said Madame Nurvetchky, rising from her seat—which action on her part, although emanating from so charming an example of her sex, did not diminish the irregularity.

"And I," said Mr. Schwabe, also assuming his perpendicular.

Of course, in anything approaching a "scene," such a gentleman as Mr. Panton was bound to be there. He was—with a vengeance. This is what he observed, in a metropolitan police court, with his hands thrust deep into his trousers pockets—by no means in a modulated tone of voice:

"I'll bet ten to one in fivers that that blessed stone played that little caper off its own bat!"

"Silence!" roared the usher, regaining his senses at last.

The magistrate glared at the excitable speakers, and particularly at Mr. Panton, who was the most excitable of all.

"Is this a court of justice?" he gasped. "Am I in a bear garden, or in an English court of law? In the whole course of my experience, I never witnessed anything so scandalous. If anything approaching it occurs again, I will have the court instantly cleared." Then he concentrated his glare on Mr. Hookham. "What has become of that letter, sir? How dare you play me such a trick!"

"I don't know what has become of

the letter. Nor did I play you a trick. It was the diamond."

Mr. Hookham's tones were harsh and cold—scornful even. The magistrate sank down into his seat, possibly overcome by the force of his emotions. Mr. Fairlight intervened.

"How can my client, who has never moved from his position in the dock, have done what we have just now seen? And if you refuse to credit the evidence of your own senses, how am I to convince you of his entire innocence of all complicity?"

"I don't need to be convinced. I've had conviction enough. I've half a mind," added Mr. Mansell, testily, "to adjourn the case at once."

"Then it is my duty, Mr. Mansell, to assure you that in that case you will be guilty of an act of grave injustice. My client, a gentleman of high standing in the city of London, is entirely innocent of the crime with which he is charged. I hope to prove it to you even out of the mouth of the witness for the prosecution who now occupies the box."

"Then prove it."

Taking out his handkerchief, the magistrate wiped his bald old head; but he glanced at the diamond out of the corners of his poor old eyes. Something like order having been obtained again in court, Mr. Fairlight resumed his cross-examination of Mr. Skene.

"You are still quite sure that Mr. Hookham killed Percy Leicester?"

"I am."

"That you still swear?"

"I do."

"Without the slightest fear of perjury before your eyes?"

"I'm telling the simple truth."

"Tell us exactly what it is you swear."

"I swear that I saw, with my own eyes, the prisoner, Hookham, kill Mr. Percy Leicester."

CHAPTER XIII.

THE MAN WHO WAS KILLED.

"Excuse me for interrupting you—but that is a mistake."

There is a method of formulating a statement in the fewest and simplest possible words, which is yet, in its result, extremely effective. For example, if A, being a small and peace-at-any-price man, gives to B, who is a large and extremely pugilistic man, the lie direct—if he says, for instance, "You're a liar"—he could hardly formulate that statement in curter or simpler language, yet the result would be undoubtedly effective.

The statement contained in the few words which commence this chapter could scarcely have been expressed, with any regard to courtesy, in a briefer or simpler form, yet it produced a most unmistakable effect upon those who heard it. Perhaps that was owing—not to place too much to the credit of the method, for *all* results have complex causes—in a measure to the speaker.

He—the speaker—was standing by the witness-box, a little to the rear of the witness. He was leaning forward, and his face was turned upward, so that he looked at Mr. Skene.

"Excuse me for interrupting you—but that is a mistake."

When those words were spoken, the witness, with a start which was quite perceptible, turned round to look at the speaker. And when he saw who it was, though there was absolutely nothing strange about the outward guise of the man, to use an extremely vulgar phrase, he "tumbled all of a heap."

He gave a sort of a gasp, and clung, with both his hands, to the rail in front of him, as though he were clinging for his life. His lower jaw fell, leaving his gaping mouth wide open, his eyes seemed starting from their sockets, and every lineament of his extensive countenance was expressive of horror and alarm.

Then, with what seemed a supreme effort, he relinquished his hold of the rail in front of him, and turned to flee, as from the wrath to come. But the speaker, whose brief utterance had caused this sudden collapse, caught him by the arm and stayed him.

"You need not be afraid."

Mr. Skene seemed to think he need. But, however great his fear might be,

it was plain that he would not persevere in his attempted flight while that grasp was on his arm.

Nor was the effect produced by the few words, and those such simple ones, which the speaker had spoken, confined to Mr. Skene.

The prisoners in the dock were staring as though they could not believe their eyes. Mr. Hookham had thrust his body half over the rail in his amazement. Madame Nurvetchky had risen from her seat, and almost lay on Mr. Hookham's back. Her husband was awake at last. His enormous eyes were open to their widest extent—he seemed to be all mustache and eyes. Colonel Dewsnap, with his whole length extending right over the table, was staring as he had never stared in his life before. Willy Panton looked as though he were meditating the operation of jumping out of his skin—he had got his "five bobs' worth" at last. While Mr. Fairlight had done what he never remembered to have done before—in his astonishment he had let his eyeglass tumble out of his eye.

But there was another actor on the scene which evinced—well, if it was not surprise, it was something else—the diamond. That curious and beautiful example of the mineral world, so soon as those few words were spoken, became enveloped in a luminous haze. For a space of two feet above and around the stone there was a sort of golden fog, which seemed to consist of myriads of faintly scintillating golden sparks.

It was this, rather than the appearance of the speaker, which seemed to surprise the magistrate. Let others stare at the newcomer if they pleased; he was content, and appeared, in fact, to be compelled, to stare at this new exhibition of eccentricity on the part of the stone. And he continued to stare so long as the exhibition lasted. It was only when it faded into nothingness that he looked up, with a gasp, to inquire into the cause of the commotion. He looked at the newcomer, who still detained Mr. Skene by the arm.

"Who are you, sir?"

"I am Percy Leicester."

"Eh?"

The newcomer's answer was given in a low but perfectly clear tone of voice, and it was probably owing to the partial state of stupefaction to which the worthy old gentleman had already been brought that he failed to catch the speaker's words.

"I am the man who was killed!"

Then—it is really distressing to observe *how* expressive these vulgar phrases are—*then,* the magistrate—"sat up." It is surprising to be told by a person that he is the man who was killed, because we do not, in the ordinary course of things, expect that such an individual will impart the information.

But when such an item of news, proceeding from so unusual a source, came as a climax to Mr. Mansell's varied experiences of his morning's sitting, it is not at all derogatory to his fame as a magistrate to confess that the old gentleman *almost* "went off his head."

"Who do you say you are?" he cried, in a sort of strangled scream.

"I am the man who was killed!"

"Oh, you're the man who was killed! Well!" Then the magistrate brought down both his fists on the desk with a bang. "If there's any other person present who wishes to make a similar observation, I hope that he'll address the court at once."

Then the people — not exactly laughed, for there was a feeling in the air that it was not a time for laughter—but they smiled, beneath their breath. The irate magistrate leaned forward on his desk and thundered at the stranger:

"How dare you, sir, trifle with this court?"

"It is far from my intention to trifle with this court. At the same time, I am the man who was killed!"

"Good—good heavens! Arrest that man, some one! Six months' hard labor!"

Whether the magistrate intended to sentence the stranger out of hand to six months' hard labor, it is fortunately unnecessary to inquire, for Mr. Fairlight intervened in the nick of time.

"One moment, Mr. Mansell. What this gentleman says is true—he is the man who was killed!"

"I am not surprised, Mr. Fairlight, to hear you say so. After what I have heard from you already, I am prepared for anything. Why doesn't somebody arrest that man?"

But Mr. Fairlight stuck to his point.

"Mr. Mansell, that gentleman is Mr. Percy Leicester."

"And who is Mr. Percy Leicester?"

"Mr. Percy Leicester is the gentleman whom my client, Mr. Hookham, is charged with having murdered."

"Are—are you joking, Mr. Fairlight?"

"I was never more in earnest in my life."

Colonel Dewsnap addressed the magistrate.

"I, sir, am Colonel Dewsnap, of the Hussars. That gentleman standing there is my friend, Percy Leicester, who was with me yesterday at the Sphinx's Cave, and whom Mr. Hookham now stands charged with having murdered."

The magistrate threw himself back into his seat with a groan. Metaphorically—it was necessarily metaphorically—he tore his hair.

"Is this—is this some wild dream! What does it mean? Is it a police case? Or a farce? Superintendent Bray, perhaps you can give me some information?"

"I can only state, your worship, that this gentleman is a stranger to me."

"But he isn't a stranger to me!"

A newcomer thrust himself forward into the body of the court. He was a short, thickset man, who appeared to be in a state of considerable perturbation, and who was clad in some sort of official garb.

"And who, sir, are you?"

"I'm the keeper of the mortuary. This here gentleman was brought in dead yesterday afternoon, and this morning he came to life again."

"Came to life again! What—what do you mean?"

"What I say. I was a-getting ready for the post-mortem, when the corpse—that's this here gentleman—sat up, and took a squint at me."

"But, good gracious! man, weren't you amazed?"

The keeper of the mortuary scratched his head.

"Amazed! I should think I was! Amazed ain't in it."

"But what happened next?"

"Well, the corpse—that's this here gentleman—he says to me, 'What's up?'

" 'Well,' I says, 'it seems that you're up for one, and that's more than you can say for most of 'em what comes in here. And,' I says, 'it's lucky you is up, considerin' they're just going to hold the post-mortem, and the jury's coming along to sit upon the body; it don't seem to me, from the look of it, as though there's going to be much sitting upon you. And there's another thing what's up,' I says: 'they're a-trying of a chap for being the death of you.' 'What!' he says. 'Yes,' I says, 'his name's 'Ookham, and they'll 'ook him if something ain't done soon.' 'Call a cab!' he says. So I called a cab and came along of him; and what that there jury'll say, when they come to sit upon the body and find me missing, and the corpse as well, is more than I quite care to think."

"Well," said the magistrate, when the laughter had subsided, for there was a certain quaintness in the fashion of the mortuary keeper's story which appealed to the risible nerves of those who heard him, "I never heard anything more amazing in my life. I suppose there is no doubt that this is Mr. Leicester?"

Mr. Fairlight answered.

"No doubt in the world. Mr. Leicester and I have been friends for years. Mr. Leicester, allow me to be the first to shake your hand."

Mr. Fairlight was the first to shake Mr. Leicester's hand—that is, supposing no one had shaken it before. Mr. Mansell followed—on the same side.

"Mr. Leicester, I congratulate you on your presence here, and on your strange, and still to be explained, restoration to life. Are you aware that you have fig-

ured here as the murdered man in a case of murder?"

Mr. Leicester turned toward Mr. Hookham, speaking in the familiar, gentle, well-bred tones.

"If any person has said that Mr. Hookham used to me any sort of violence, or touched me with his hands, that person has lied."

"Do I understand you to say, Mr. Leicester, that—eh—Mr. Hookham never touched you?"

"That is so. He never touched me, never once."

"But"—here the magistrate glanced at Mr. Skene—"what has this man been saying?"

Mr. Fairlight spoke.

"I am not sure that I ought not at once to apply for a warrant for perjury."

"Do you apply? I shall certainly grant it if you do."

"I ought first to confer with my client."

Mr. Hookham interposed.

"Let the man go," he said.

"Mr. Hookham," cried the magistrate, "you are doing what not one man in your position in a thousand would do; and though your action is worthy of admiration, I am not sure that I ought to allow you to so lightly excuse this man's offense. A grosser case of perjury, and that from a man who calls himself a minister of the gospel, I never yet encountered."

Mr. Skene endeavored to obtain a hearing.

"Sir, I protest——"

"You protest! How dare you protest! I have listened to too many of your protestations already. You have deliberately endeavored to swear away a fellow creature's life, and were it not for what amounts almost to a miracle, you might have his blood upon your soul. When next Sunday you stand in a pulpit, if you do stand in a pulpit—and if I had my way you should never stand in a pulpit again—make confession of your sin in the face of your assembled congregation. Then, and not till then, dare to ask an honest man to excuse you. Put that person out of court."

A constable put his hand on Mr. Skene's shoulder, and "put" him out of court.

During this short interlude Mr. Leicester had retained his position by the side of the witness-box, seeming, with his air of well-bred indifference, as though the proceedings had no interest for him. When, however, the reverend gentleman had made so undignified and unclerical an exit, he addressed the magistrate—so soon, that is, as that pillar of the state exhibited signs of having regained some slight portion of his mental equilibrium.

"It would appear advisable, under what I understand to be the existing state of affairs, that I should offer some explanation of my presence here. I am prepared, with your permission, to make a statement now."

Mr. Mansell settled his spectacles upon his nose.

"Eh—I'm bound to say—eh—that some explanation would be advisable. In fact, Mr. Leicester, I shall be glad to listen to any statement you may wish to make."

Mr. Leicester slightly bowed. He entered the witness-box. He began his tale.

"I should observe, as a preliminary, and as some justification of the course of action which the police have taken, that I was killed."

The magistrate gave a slight start.

"Eh—what is that you say?"

"I was killed."

Again the magistrate settled his spectacles upon his nose. He looked round the court with a somewhat vacuous expression of countenance, a dim doubt appearing again to cross his mind as to whether he was not being made the victim of some elaborate and astounding practical joke. It seemed as though he looked to see who might be laughing. But, so far as he could judge, the bearing of every one within the court was grave, and Mr. Leicester was gravest of all.

"Well, I have seen and heard some remarkable things in the course of my

life, and I have lived to a ripe old age, but it would seem that the most remarkable have been reserved for the evening of my days. Did I understand you to say that you were killed?"

"That is so."

"Oh, well! Go on."

"To make my explanation quite plain, it is necessary that I should go back a little."

"Oh, well, if you're going to make your explanation *quite* plain, you can go back as far as you like."

"When I was stationed at Simla, there were stories current among the natives concerning a diamond—a diamond to which were attributed supernatural powers. Such stories are not uncommon in India, and in this, as in other cases, it was difficult to pin the narrators down to any given facts. Although their faith was genuine, their grounds for that faith were vague. But certain details I did arrive at. The diamond, which was one of great value, was being continually passed from hand to hand, always as a gift. Men welcomed it with effusion, then passed it from them in despair. It always brought ill luck to its possessor. It could not be sold. It must be given away. If it were not given quickly it brought ruin, even death, upon its owner. There were stranger things told about the diamond than this, such as that an attendant devil went always with the diamond; but these were wild and visionary, and were scarcely to be focused into concrete statements. I left no means untried to get a sight of the diamond; but I never saw it once."

Again the magistrate gave an impatient twitch to the spectacles upon his nose.

"No, I can quite believe you never did."

"But I carried the stories with me in my mind. When I saw that M. and Madame Nurvetchky were about to introduce, at the Sphinx's Cave what they called the Devil's Diamond, those stories recurred to me at once. Nor had the introduction proceeded far when I began to believe that I had lighted on the stone at last."

"What, the stone you had heard the tales about in India?"

"The same. I have devoted a great deal of my time to what I may call the science of conjuring. I do not speak lightly when I say that I do not believe there is a conjurer living who could deceive me by the exercise of his art. It was not long before I saw that what was taking place on the stage at the Sphinx's Cave did not come within the domain of what are known as conjuring tricks."

"What were they then?"

"In the first place, I believed what M. Nurvetchky said, that neither he nor his wife nor Mr. Hookham could offer an explanation of what we saw. In the second, I thought it possible that it might have a supernatural origin."

"A supernatural origin? The tomfool tricks we've heard about?"

"I do not know what you have heard about. I thought that what I saw upon the stage at the Sphinx's Cave probably had a supernatural origin."

"But I understood Mr. Fairlight to say that you went upon the stage because you believed that the whole thing was an imposture."

Mr. Fairlight interposed.

"I said nothing of the kind. What I did say was all the other way. The impression in my own mind was that Mr. Leicester went on to the stage because he believed."

Mr. Mansell leaned back in his seat with a gasp; the proceedings were becoming—indeed, they had become from the first—too much for him. Mr. Leicester went on in his quiet, equable, well-bred tones, as though he were dealing with the most ordinary banalities.

"I have for years been aware that there are existences apart from our own, that there are forces, under ordinary circumstances, not visible to the naked eye. Charlatans, with an eye to plunder, pretend to be in communication with these powers—powers for which men have not yet suggested a sufficient name. When I saw that diamond it was not long before I perceived that an opportunity had presented itself for

me to place myself in communication with one, at least, of those powers—in that communication to which charlatans only pretend. It was with the intention of doing so that I went upon the stage."

"Oh, that was the intention with which you went upon the stage? I see. To place yourself in communication with—eh—something, I don't quite understand what—but no matter. Did you succeed?"

"I did, almost too well. I will not go into details of what I did, you have probably already heard sufficient upon that point from other sources. As I proceeded with my experiments, I became aware that the something with which I was in communication was distinctly hostile. I even felt that if I persisted, the result might be a tragedy. But my love for inquiry must, I fancy, be greater than my love for life. I continued. At a certain point the something with which I was in communication materialized. In the confusion, and owing, too, in some measure, to the sudden strain upon my nerves, my faculties of observation were blunted. But it seemed to me that it assumed, in its materialized state, the form of an ape, an ape which, so far as my experience goes, was of unusual size. I was conscious that it made an unpleasant noise. It seemed enraged. With both hands it caught me by the throat, and choked the life right out of me. I was dead."

Mr. Leicester paused. And, so to speak, the people in the court paused, too. There was an audible silence. To hear a man say, in such a matter-of-fact tone of voice, that he was dead, partook of the nature of a new experience.

"And in my state of death the thing went with me. I saw it, in infinite space, in the figure of an ape. I saw the diamond, too. The ape sat on the diamond. And I saw that what it seemed the diamond did was really done by the ape. I followed it to the station. I saw it perform the tricks which startled the inspector. I followed it to the cell. I saw the ape assume the guise of a young man. I saw it stand by Mr. Fairlight's side, and I heard it say, as plainly as you hear me now—and it laid its hand on Mr. Fairlight's shoulder—'There are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamed of in man's philosophy.'"

Mr. Leicester paused again. Mr. Fairlight looked at Mr. Hookham, and an odd glance was exchanged between them. But the people in the court seemed to hold their breath. As for the magistrate, he sat with his mouth wide open, and his eyes peering through his spectacles with the fixed rigidity of an owl's.

"I followed it to this court. I saw it seated upon the stone on the magistrate's desk, exulting in the tricks it played. On a sudden it left the stone and came to me and touched me, and I was no longer dead, I was alive. I found that I was in the deadhouse, and that the keeper of the dead was standing by my side."

Mr. Leicester ceased, and silence followed—silence which was broken by the magistrate.

"Well, I—I think we'd better adjourn—until to-morrow."

Mr. Mansell said this like a man in a dream, as though he himself were not aware of what it was that he said. While the old gentleman continued to gape and to stare, Mr. Leicester spoke again.

"What I have said seems strange."

The magistrate opened his eyes, if possible, still wider than before.

"*Seems* strange!" he said.

"But that is only owing to our imperfect knowledge. What we do not know we wonder at. Ignorance esteems all things strange. It is even an attribute of some natures to be fearful of what is wonderful and strange. But because we know that some unnamed thing, with undefined powers, sits, in the form of an ape, on the diamond which, sir, is now upon your desk——"

The magistrate awoke with a start. His countenance assumed quite a pasty hue. He rose from his seat in haste. With a degree of agility which was remarkable in one so aged, he put as much space as the exigencies of his position would admit between himself

and the diamond, which glittered in its tranquil beauty on his desk.

"The—the case is dismissed. In fact, there's no case to dismiss; there's—there's been a misapprehension from the first. Officer, remove that—that diamond."

Mr. Mansell pointed to the stone with a finger which actually trembled. His instruction was a trifle vague, at least no one seemed to apply it to himself. Mr. Hookham's harsh tones were heard.

"Am I free to go?"

"Free? Free? Good gracious, yes! There's—there's no case at all."

"Then I suppose I may have my diamond?"

"Take it, my good sir, I do beg you'll take it. There—there are some remarks I—eh—wish to make upon—eh—this curious case, but I'll postpone them till to-morrow."

The magistrate not only postponed his remarks until to-morrow, but he disappeared himself, through the door which led into his private room, in a way which might appropriately, if irreverently, be described as "bolting."

CHAPTER XIV.

MR. HOOKHAM RETURNS TO MITRE COURT.

When Mr. Hookham at last returned to Mitre Court, he made himself fast within his chambers. He sported his oak, bolting, barring and locking it, and securing it by every means within his power. Then he went through a similar process with the inner door, and when he had made his fortress what he deemed sufficiently impregnable, he stood for a moment, listening. There was not a sound. All was still. Then he turned, and let his eyes travel round the room.

It was certainly a large room, and it was certainly ill-furnished—the light of the solitary tallow candle revealed so much as that.

At the opposite end of the room was a door, which led into his sleeping room. Next to the door was an ancient carved oak mantelpiece. It was not a bad mantelpiece in its way, but it added to the somber appearance of the room. There was a huge, old-fashioned open grate, large enough, in the colloquial phrase, to roast an ox. Just then it was red with rust, and littered with odds and ends and scraps of paper. It looked desolate and dirty.

There was no carpet on the floor—Mr. Hookham dispensed with such a luxury as that—and the floor itself was worm-eaten and old; it looked as though it had never been washed for years.

The principal article of furniture the room contained was a large, old oak table, which occupied the center. It had doubtless originally been intended to serve as a dining table, but since those days it had apparently done duty in a nursery or schoolroom, for it had been scarred by knives, covered with names and initials, which had been cut, and, in some cases, burned, deep into the wood, and blotched with ink.

A ragged old couch stood at one side against the wall; three ordinary chairs and one armchair—it was such a ruin of an armchair!—occupied positions about the room. And, if we except the safe, that was all the furniture the place contained.

The safe was half built into the wall. It had once been painted green, but the paint had long since gone. Small patches of it were visible here and there, but for the most part the safe, which appeared to have been constructed of cast iron, was as rusty as the grate.

Nor was the cheerless look of the apartment lessened by the indescribable state of litter it was in. The floor was half hidden beneath an extraordinary conglomeration of contrasting articles. Among them were two or three tin boxes, with their locks wrenched off, a cashbox in the same condition, account books, odds and ends of clothing, crockery, the greater part of it shattered into fragments, scraps of food, and a great host of papers and documents, of every size, shape and color; in one place a paint pot, half full of black paint, had been turned upside down; probably it

was the same paint which Mr. Hookham had used to cover the inscription on the door. In another a lamp had been broken. The presence of the oil which had been issued from it was unpleasantly perceptible. On the table, which was covered with the same incongruous collection, a quart bottle of ink had been emptied.

It seemed as though some malignant sprite had set himself to work as much confusion and do as much mischief as was possible.

Mr. Hookham stood in grim silence, observing this unpleasant state of things. As he gradually took in the various details, and began to fully realize the effect of the whole, his features became, if possible, harder and sterner than before.

"If I knew the lad who had done this, he should have a lifer."

There could be no doubt, judging from the tone and manner in which the words were spoken, that if he had anything to do with it the lad referred to would. He moved to the table.

"The lamp broken! What shall I do?"

He looked at the candle. It was one of those tallow "dips," which we scarcely see nowadays, except in chandlers' shops in out-of-the-way places.

"I must manage with that. When it is done for, I'll go to bed."

Hitherto he had not removed his hat. This seeming to occur to him all at once, he took it off. Putting up his hand, he passed his fingers through his thick growth of iron-gray hair. Going to the safe, he threw the door wide open. His eye caught the open cash-box lying on the floor. His glance wandered round the room. It lighted on an old, red-leather box. He picked it up. It was empty—shattered almost into fragments.

"Nearly nine hundred pounds' worth of jewels! Curse the thief!"

Dropping the fragments of the red-leather box, he began examining in hot haste the litter on the floor. At last he came on a sheaf of long, narrow slips of blue paper, tied round with a piece of red tape. They were bills of exchange—another form of security in which he dealt. He snatched them up. He ran through them, with eager eyes and fingers.

"Safe! The fool!"

That was the form of thanks with which he recorded the fact that they had not gone with the jewels.

"I'll put them in my pocket; for the present they'll be better there. To-morrow I'll deposit them in Chancery Lane. I ought to have put them there before, but I never thought of burglars, so I always kept them ready to my hand."

He suited "the action to the word and the word to the action" by putting them into the inside breast pocket of his coat. Then he stood, silently looking round the room. As if unconsciously, his hand wandered to his waistcoat pocket. The fingers slipped inside. When they came back they brought the diamond with them. He looked down at it.

"The ape," he said.

He laughed. He had not laughed for years—perhaps that was why his laugh had grown so rusty. If laughter with him meant emitting such a sound, one could but hope either that he would oil the works or never laugh again.

"Is all this owing, then, to you?"

It was difficult to credit, hard to believe, that that rare and wondrous gem, almost seeming a miracle in its great beauty, could bring anything but pleasure in its train.

"Must I, after all these years, believe that fairy tales are true?"

He raised his eyes from the stone. Slightly throwing back his head, he seemed to look into space with a long, unflinching gaze, as though he were looking for something which was there.

"True, true!"

He shook his head with an impatient gesture.

"Bah! If fairy tales are true, how I've wasted all those years!"

He went to the safe, the door of which was still wide open. He put the diamond upon the lower shelf and closed the door.

"Stay there a while. I don't think I need be afraid of being robbed of you."

His glance traveled again about the room. He began to rummage among the chaos on the floor. After considerable searching, he unearthed from under a heap of papers a short account book, which was secured by two locks. He eyed this with evident satisfaction. He took his handkerchief from his pocket and carefully wiped the covers.

Tucking it under his arm, he went to the table. Clearing a space upon it by the simple process of sweeping off whatever was in the way on to the floor, he put the account book down. Fetching the candle from where it stood, he placed it close by the book. He got himself a chair. Taking a bunch of keys from his pocket, he opened the locks, for each lock using a separate key. Then, seating himself, he began studying the pages of his books.

His studies occupied him a considerable time. He was continually adding up columns of figures and jotting down the totals on a piece of paper at his side. These, in their turn, he added up again. Finally, he rested his elbow on the table and shaded his eyes with his hand.

"I'm a rich man," he said. "A rich man."

He rose from his seat and began strolling round the room.

"A rich man! A rich man!"

He repeated it two or three times, as he paced on and on.

"Yes, I'm a rich man, even as riches go. As I stand, I'm worth more than a million pounds."

A million pounds! That is a large sum, even in these days of many millions. He did not look as though he were a millionaire. Nor did the room look as though it were a room in which a millionaire resided.

But then we know that some of the richest men possess the simplest tastes. If Mr. Hookham ever had a biographer, possibly the historian—especially if he were a believer in the "Self-Help" doctrine, "Live on sixpence a day and die worth a hundred thousand pounds"—might record, as one of his hero's finest characteristics, a beautiful simplicity.

When Mr. Hookham had sufficiently digested the fact how rich he was, he went to the safe, and took out the diamond again.

"So you're going to ruin me, are you? It will take a good deal of ruining, more than a million. Especially invested as I've invested mine."

He placed the diamond beside his account book on the table. He seated himself. He leaned back in his chair. And thought.

It never occurred to him that any of that million was ill-gotten—he was not that sort of man. It never occurred to him that in getting it he had wasted opportunities; he could conscientiously lay his hand upon his heart and say that he did not think he ever had. It never occurred to him that there was any value, which he had lost, in such trifles as a home, a wife, children, friends, reputation.

The whole volume of sentiment which those things represent was a sealed book to him—he would not have unsealed it if he had had the chance. There are multitudes of men in whose lives women, to put it very gently, take a secondary place—in Mr. Hookham's life they had had no place at all. He had never kissed a girl in his life—and never wanted to.

Mr. Hookham found happiness in getting money—not in the money when it was got, but in the getting it; in the race, and not the prize. He honestly did not care for any of the material delights which money buys. Just as the gardener delights in "nursing" his plants—and what love, patience and science are needed to properly do that!—so Mr. Hookham delighted in "nursing his gold."

What did occur to him, as he sat thinking there, was this: It occurred to him to plan for the future. There was the diamond in front of him. He realized that it was a new factor in his life—a factor which must be at once considered.

A million pounds! One can do so much with a million. Mr. Hookham told himself that he could do much with his; what should he do? Should

he live up to it? Should he leave it where it was, and draw the interest and spend it? How?

One might spend a certain amount on the pleasures of the palate, but Mr. Hookham cared nothing for them. He might marry a wife—she could spend his money for him if he liked—but he told himself quite candidly that he would sooner dance on the tight rope than marry a wife.

Then there were horses: there were idiots who lost their money in what was popularly called "racing"; but he protested inwardly that he had not got down *quite* so low as that. Or he might gamble—but he had been a gambler all his life; he had always played to win—to lose was agony. What was there left?

Twelve hundred thousand pounds! Why, with such a sum as that, a man could do anything. Yes, but what? What anything that was something to him? Youth has pleasures which age has not; and even such pleasures as age has require cultivation. You don't like olives when first you taste them. You can't spring to the complete enjoyment of an exquisite wine at a single bound.

Such men as Mr. Hookham, if they can find enjoyment in what are called pleasures at all, can only find it in simple ones. And you cannot spend the interest of twelve hundred thousand pounds upon simplicity. This seemed a little hard.

As he began to realize this—the fact, which he had never faced before, that the spending of his money, if it brought him anything, would bring him pain—his ears caught a sudden sound. He glared at the diamond. It came again—it was the sound of laughter; it came from the stone. Was the diamond laughing at him, then?

He rose from his seat with an angry movement; he began again to pace the room. Throughout his life he had flattered himself upon one thing—that he was not as other men, a fool. Was he, then, going to become a fool now that he was old? Was he going to be frightened by a piece of stone—a diamond? Was he going to allow so trivial a cause to alter the whole end and purpose of his life?

He loved—he held his hands out in front of him in a sort of paroxysm—he loved, how he loved! getting money. The plotting, the planning and the scheming; the overreaching of his fellows, the measuring of wits, the keenness of the strife—as the hunt to the hound these things were to his nostrils as the breath of life. If it came to that, he would give the diamond away to-morrow.

And yet—twenty thousand pounds! He suffered a sense of physical pain at the idea of giving anything. It violated a fundamental law of his existence. He never had given a beggar a penny in his life; but he had seen other men doing it, and he had suffered for their sin. The sight of such an action made him ill at ease, just as an honest man is ill at ease by being made the involuntary witness of a crime.

And for him spontaneously, voluntarily, of his own free will, to give away such a sum as twenty thousand pounds—he couldn't do it! He shuddered as he only thought of it. His heart died within him; he was afraid, just as the wretch is afraid who meditates, in the dark hours of the night, on some hideous crime.

He set himself to think out a method by which he could escape the difficulty by, so to speak, some side door. He realized that it would be vain openly to attempt to sell the stone; he realized, too, that it would be equally vain to think of keeping it. If it did not bring him ruin, it might work him inconvenience; and had he not already suffered actual loss?

No, while he feigned to give it away, he must think of some means by which he might secure for himself an actual *quid pro quo*.

That was the problem which he set himself to solve.

TO BE CONTINUED.

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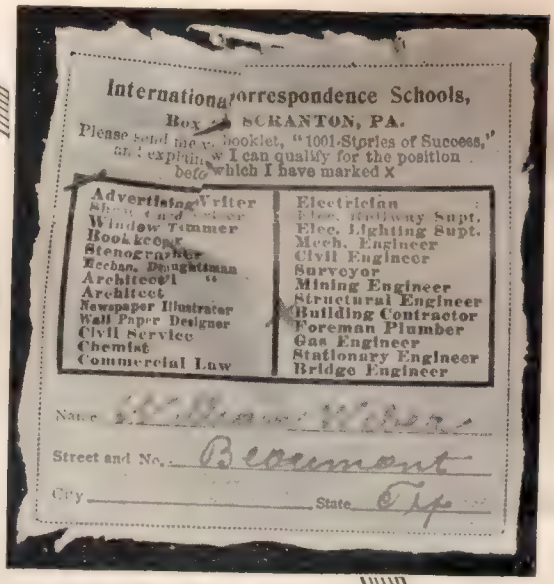

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Here are some other features of *the September* POPULAR.

The Ship Owner, by Morgan Robertson; A Campaign of Conquest, by W. Bert Foster; In Defense of Honor, by Captain Hector Orme Blanding; The Ghost of La Moissine, by Clinton Dangerfield; Annabel's Wager, by Rafael Sabatini; The Honor of the Ambassador, by George Bronson-Howard; and The Club-House Contingent, by Charles Steinfort Pearson.

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THE GIBSON GIRL OF THE STAGE

In recent years no painter has succeeded in portraying such a popular type of womanhood as "The Gibson Girl," by Charles Dana Gibson, the great American "black-and-white artist." And yet there are many people who believe that the Gibson Girl is purely an imaginary type of girl, and that she only exists in the imagination of the artist.

Never was there a more erroneous idea, for to-day, in Fifth Avenue, New York, the Gibson Girl with the Broadway walk can be seen every day of the week. She has a personality all to herself, her gowns are always the "very latest," and her walk—well, it is the essence of originality, and according to the "smart set," of grace.

Some time ago, an American syndicate decided to show England what the Gibson Girl really was like, and with this object in view, a prize of $2,000.00 was offered to the American girl, who, in the opinion of a committee of expert judges, was best fitted to occupy this important position.

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"The fashionable New York girl," says Miss Clifford, "walks with a peculiarly graceful bend from the hips, the upper part of the body remaining perfectly stiff, while the lower limbs move with a gliding motion.

"This is the best description I can give of the Gibson Girl's walk, and I think it is comparatively clear. Some writers, however, seem to be under the impression that the walk is the sort of gait a cat would assume in walking across a floor composed of red-hot bricks—at least, that is the impression the average description leaves on one's mind." Before sailing for England where, by the way, she is the biggest sensation that ever stepped on the shores of Old Britain, Miss Clifford posed for a remarkable series of pictures, a small reproduction of which appears at the bottom of this page. The title of the picture is "Osculation," the portraits depicting the various stages of the kiss. There at once became a tremendous demand for the pictures, not only because of the fame of the actress who posed for them, but because of the real worth of the series. To supply this popular demand, AINSLEE'S MAGAZINE which has control of the pictures, reproduced the photographs in a novel manner. On a sheet of very heavy paper, size 9¼ x 29½ inches, the portraits have been printed in duo-tone colors. Each portrait is of cabinet size, and a rich maroon border gives the whole the exact effect of seven photographs mounted on a mat ready for framing. The idea is altogether a novel one and is copyrighted by AINSLEE'S MAGAZINE.

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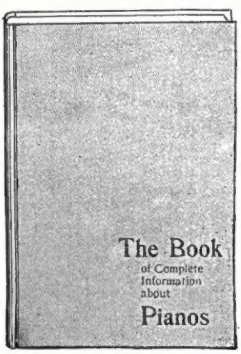

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